



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

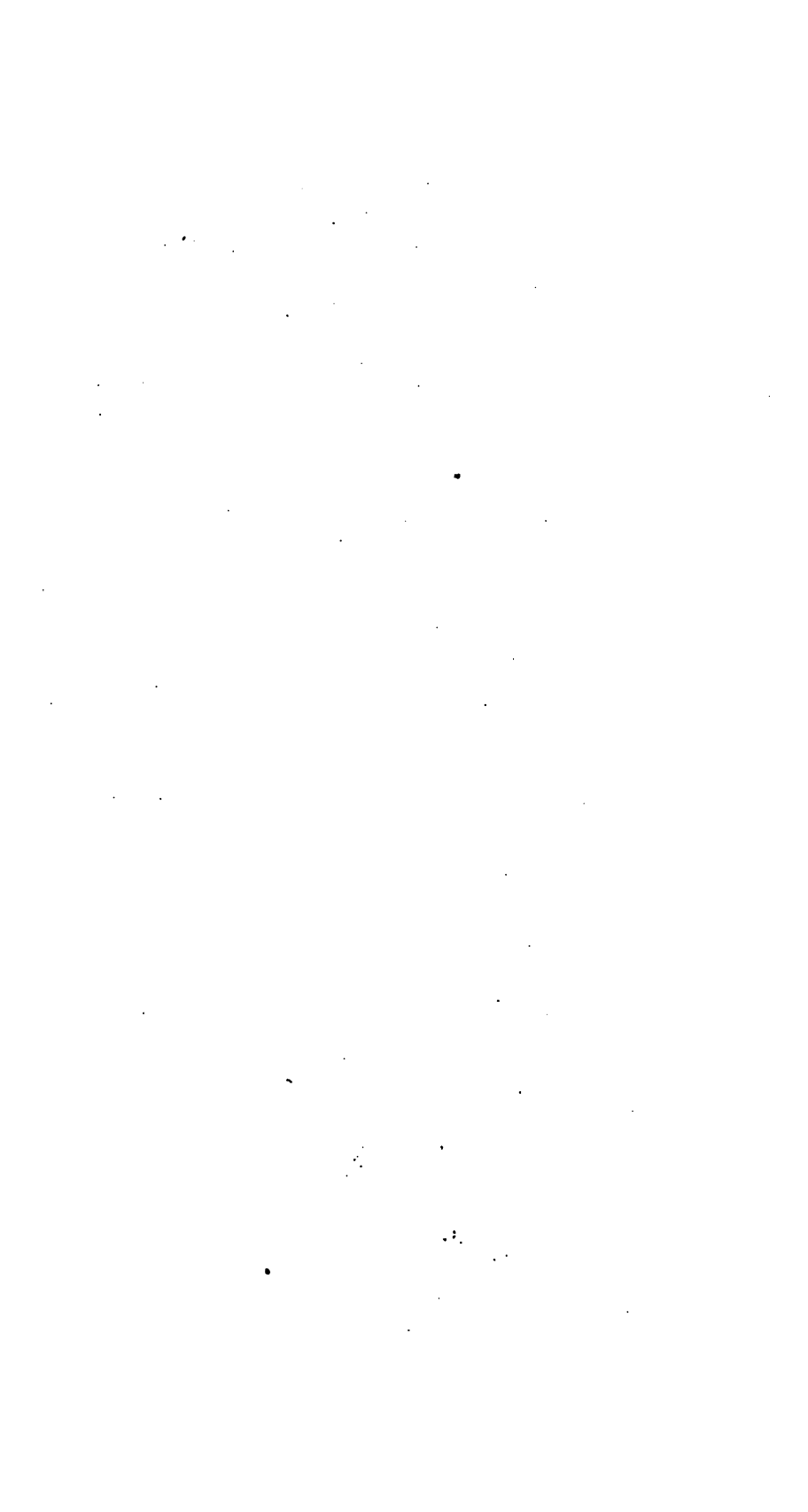
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

UR
STUDY
MEETING.

J. H. WRIGHT.







OUR STUDY MEETING

OR

THE OFFERING OF ISAAC BY ABRAHAM

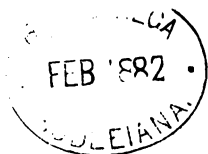
CONSIDERED BY A BODY OF

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS.

BY

J. HORNSBY WRIGHT.

AUTHOR OF "THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES OF A CHARITY
ORGANIZATIONIST;" "CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD ALMSGIVER," ETC.



London:

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCLXXXI.

141. m. 991.

LONDON

G. NORMAN AND SON, PRINTERS, 29, MAIDEN LANE,
COVENT GARDEN.

PREFACE.

THE following pages present an attempt to show that the Evangelic Theology, with all its vital verities, can be held in their fulness by those who tie themselves to no conventional *patois*, or timid propriety in regard to mere style.

Against such characteristics, if the writer may trust his own observation and experience, a dead set is being made in our day, at least by all who embraced not the Truth in those halcyon days when Evangelical Christianity was represented amongst Churchmen by a John Newton or Henry Venn, amongst Nonconformists by a John Angell James.

“Certainly the aspect of the times should modify the preaching,” once wrote Ohio’s saintly Bishop, Charles Pettitt McIlwaine. The concession of course concerned *manner* alone, and in no degree extended to *matter*, at least where fundamentals are concerned. But if such a precept will hold as regards the more sacred outpourings of the pulpit, how much more must it be applicable to religious utterances unconnected with the sanctuary!

The following pages contain a fair picture of the kind of treatment which Bible-themes were wont to

receive at a Teacher's Study-meeting over which it is but ingenuous to confess that, owing to the other innumerable and oppressive engagements of the clergy, the author as superintendent had almost always to preside.

As, however, the normal arrangement on such occasions is undoubtedly for the clergy to occupy the chair, the author has thought it better to give that form to the meeting as depicted in his pages.

OUR STUDY MEETING.

EVENING I.

SCENE.—The class-room of the National School of the District. The occasion—The Sunday School Teachers' Weekly Study Meeting.

SUBJECT.—The offering up of Isaac.

PRESENT.—The Rev. FERDINAND FAITHFUL, M.A., Incumbent.—The Rev. ZACHARY ZEALOUS, B.A., Curate.—Mr. HORATIO RULE, the Superintendent, a Gentleman of private means.—Mr. LOGIC, M.A., Barrister-at-law.—Mr. GENTLE, M.A., formerly a University Tutor.—Dr. WELLREAD, LL.D., preparing young men for the Universities, &c.—MAJOR MODEST, a retired Military Officer.—Mr. EBENEZER SHREWD, an elderly person in a good way of business.—Mr. OLDWAYS, a retired Draper in good circumstances.—MATTHEW HUMBLE, Clerk to a Firm of Solicitors.—REUBEN ARTLESS, a young Mechanic.

After the singing of a hymn, and prayer by the Curate, the Vicar thus addresses the meeting :—

We have before us this evening one of the most profoundly interesting, not to say startling, of Old

Testament chapters. Few events or transactions ever recorded by pen sacred or profane can vie in peculiarity with the intended offering, at Divine command, of Isaac by Abraham as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Whether we look at the intense, the unique singularity of the command itself as calculated (*seipso*, that is, and apart from the character and rights of Him who gave it), to outrage every instinct and feeling of our nature, its startling inconsistency with enactments at that very moment constituting Divine Law, not to name other considerations which will present themselves as we proceed, it must be admitted that no portion of Holy Writ could be more fraught with interest, or require, in the treatment of it, more guidance from on high. In proceeding to study the contents of this matchless chapter, the first thing demanding consideration seems to be the word "tempt."

Mr. Shrewd.—I beg pardon, sir. I hope we are not going to pass over the words "after these things."

Vicar.—Are they more than a simple chronological indication fixing the point in Abraham's career at which the transaction took place?

Mr. Shrewd.—I regard them, sir, as the key to the whole business. 'Tis a case, I opine, not of *post hoc* only but of *propter hoc* likewise.

Vicar.—Well: give us your views on it. It happens to be your turn to open our subject.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well and good, dear sir. But please remember you will get nothing from me but my own

thoughts. I study the Bible first hand. Not from what boys call "bumptiousness," or anything of that kind, but I pin not my faith to any annotator under the sun. Since I first knew the Lord I have always had this feeling, that the self-same reasons, so to speak, which our Heavenly Father had for giving us a Bible at all would make Him safe to give us a sound, workable, safe Translation—a Translation which would never lead us wrong in anything material—a Translation near enough, correct enough, and sound enough for all practical purposes, and it's very little I care for purposes of any other sort. Moreover, I have full leave and license—nay it is my bounden duty—to go direct to Him for guidance in studying my Translation. What told on the minds of the writers and kept them all square can just as well tell on the minds of the readers and keep them all square. Besides the Bible was not meant for scholars as such, but rather for no-scholars—for wayfaring men though fools,—

Vicar.—Yes; only this morning I was reading the learned John Smith's profound Discourse on Prophecy ("Select Discourses," 175), in which he says, "The Scripture was not writ for sagacious and abstracted minds only, or philosophical heads; for then how few are there that should have been taught the true knowledge of God thereby." Excuse my interrupting you.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well then, dear Mr. Vicar, it comes to pass that what you get from me is only what I have got from the Bible direct, and not, if I may speak

commercially, *viâ* other peoples' brains, or any route, line, or track of thinking, marked out by learned divines, whether as old as the hills or as modern as Bishop Ryle (God bless him)!—

Vicar.—But had you not better come to the subject more immediately before us? Kindly favour us with your thoughts on this phrase, “After these things.”

Mr. Shrewd.—Very good, sir. But let me premise a few things first, *Imprimis*. I presume we are all agreed that the Bible is not the work of many authors, but of One, that is God. *Item*. That when that Sole Author was providentially bringing about, adjusting and arranging the events and happenings fore-ordained to furnish the subject-matter of Genesis, He was quite aware that He intended in after ages to have that Epistle written to the Romans wherein this same Abraham was to figure as the A 1 example of justifying faith. *Item*. That it is plain as the noses on our faces, that what Abraham was fore-ordained to shine in more than anything else was Faith, glorious Faith. *Item*. That this was in order to make plain the way and the manner of Justification, one of the matters about which that upstart man has seen fit to differ very extensively in opinion and liking from his maker,—God, I take it, going in for Justification by faith and all the glory—man determined to have his finger in the pie, and two-thirds of the glory, and hence going in for Justification by works, or at all events regaling himself with a kind of theological

Half-and-half—half faith half works—of his own brewing. Is the meeting with me so far?

Vicar.—Yes, I think so, in substance. Your way of expressing yourself, dear Mr. Shrewd, would as usual admit of improvement.

Mr. Shrewd.—My dear sir, you are always complaining (not unkindly—I don't mean that) of my manner of speech. But I really must speak as I feel. I cannot get up a particular dialect for religious purposes. I cannot for the life of me see why we should not be natural, in a good sense of course, in spiritual as well as other things.

Vicar.—Yes; but there is a medium in all things; and you really do, dear Mr. Shrewd, at times get beyond all bounds.

Mr. Shrewd.—Ah! well. I believe a good deal of mischief has been done by long faces, whining tones, and set pious phrases. Even where it is not cant it passes for it. There's my nephew, a young fellow in a public office; and he tells me 'tis the feeling of all the young men he comes across. "Uncle," he says, "it's not exactly the Evangelical doctrines we object to—but the Evangelicals are such a muffy lot, taking everything for granted; such a namby-pamby, goody-goody, as-it-was-in-the-beginning, set of individuals—no freshness—no force—no fire—no go—no style;—the Broad Church have got all that. There's no original thought about them—they're where they were in the Year One. I like," he says, "something fresh—some-

thing spicy—something telling—something to rouse you—something to set your ‘thinker’ going.” Then I have a niece—one of those Girton girls. She’s always harping on the same string—she’s worse than the boy. I tell you what it is, Mr. Vicar; I believe that if we Evangelicals were only to feel more than we do, and then speak as we feel, we could carry everything before us.

Mr. Gentle.—I think, sir, there is something (at least in one direction,—for his remark by no means covers the whole ground) in what our friend says. I rather think, with Foster and Vinet, that a little more *naturalness* would not come amiss in some of us.

Vicar.—Oh, I don’t object to that. I am no advocate for artificial orthodoxy, a conventional uniformity of tone or diction—a mere *patois*; but I do think our friend Shrewd,— However, we must get on,—we must get back to our point.

Superintendent.—*Apropos*, for a moment, of this last topic, however, did you notice what Bishop Ryle is reported to have lately said respecting Preaching?— “I hope that many will lay aside for ever that orthodox prosiness, that respectable dulness, that leaden heaviness, that first-person-plural vagueness, that guinea-pig-like tameness, those dreary commonplaces, which the laity too often complain of as the characteristics of the modern parson’s sermon. Why,” he added, “in the name of Common Sense should lively, fine, animated, rousing, stirring, interesting,

heart-searching, conscience-pricking, mind-arresting, thought-suggesting, burning sermons be confined to Mission-preaching?"

Mr. Logic.—Hear, hear!—and if that be true *re* the pulpit, *a fortiori* will it hold of less sacred discussions.

Vicar.—Yes; but, as usual, we are getting desultory. We really must return to our subject. Now, Mr. Shrewd.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, then, my next point is, that up to that one related in this chapter, no act of Abraham's faith had been at all unique, without equal in kind as well as degree, that is.

Mr. Oldways.—What! not in the matter of believing that Sarah could and should at her time of life—mind! at her time of life—have a child?

Mr. Shrewd.—Have patience with me, brother Oldways. I'll come to that presently. I say it again—in nothing hitherto (not even the matter of Isaac's supernatural birth) had Abraham exhibited a faith really and truly *sui generis*, as you that talk Latin call it. Until now he had always somebody to keep him company. I do not say that his faith may not have gone, in mere *quantum*, beyond his wife's, his nephew's, &c.; but I say that his faith and their's was of the same sort, if not size (for that matter all true faith is of one sort; but I now mean the same sort as to the particular object)—just as a Family Bible and Pica are both Bibles, albeit one is so much bigger than the other.

Curate.—I beg pardon ; but is that so as regards the birth of offspring ? Why, Sarah ridiculed the idea of its possibility, and was reproved for her unseemly incredulity.

Mr. Shrewd.—No doubt at starting she was unbelieving on the point ; but what saith the Scriptures ? (putting her in the same boat with Abraham)—“Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed.”

Vicar.—Yes ; that is so. I am not sure that Mr. Shrewd is not right. Not as promptly, but in the end quite as fully as Abraham’s own, would Sarah’s faith seem to have ignored the natural impossibilities of the case.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, then, as to his getting away from his country, kindred, father’s house, &c. ; are we not distinctly told that “Lot went with him ?”—and seemingly so did his whole house. Don’t suppose that I want to undervalue his faith. God forbid ! I only wish we had more such faith now-a-days. But I say he did not stand alone in exercising it,—there were plenty to keep him company. Then as to his sojourning “in the land of Promise as in a strange country,”—why they all sojourned. Here again I make not light of his faith. I admire it. I envy it. I glorify God for it ; but I say it was more or less the faith of the whole party—not of Abraham alone, though I dare say he was (my classics will pop out now and then) “*primus inter pares*,” as the saying is. Do you all go with me so far ?

Mr. Oldways.—No ; I don't. I call all this new-fangled fudge, made out of your own head.

Mr. Shrewd.—Ah ! dear brother, you are always loyal to the “As-it-was-in-the-beginning-ever-shall-it-be” Thinkers, if they be such at all who never seem to use their thinkers.

Vicar.—My dear friends, pray confine yourselves to the language of Christian courtesy. Allow me to suggest that, as the opening of the subject is with him, Mr. Shrewd be allowed to proceed without interruption. When he has finished we can each, in a manner at once candid and courteous, bring forward our objections to anything we may think fairly open to exception. Now, Mr. Shrewd.

Mr. Shrewd.—Very good, sir. Then I say that up to this time Abraham had showed no faith out-and-out unique, *i.e.* quite out of the common,—a faith no one went halves in. But I have now to point out that in two notable instances he showed the grossest want of faith, and behaved indeed so scandalously, that in my humble judgment he deserved to be flogged at a cart's-tail for it. I should not wonder if that vile old goat Falstaff had Abraham in his eye, when he said, “How this world is given to lying.”

Vicar.—Pardon me, my dear sir ; but what possible occasion can there be for such language as this ? Pray remember that we are dealing with the procedure of one of the most eminent and most holy of God's acknowledged servants—the Father of the Faithful—

one concerning whom the most distinguished race earth has ever seen, or ever will see, has ever been proud to boast. "We have Abraham to our father."

Mr. Shrewd.—Yes; and I think that makes his conduct all the worse. I say that when a child of God sins, his sin is ten times worse—more base—more shameful than if he were not a child of God. Were I to catch a bishop doing something immoral, I'd have him flogged with a cat-o'-*ninety*-tails, just because he was a bishop, doubly bound to walk uprightly and set a good example. And so any clergyman, Sunday-school teacher, scripture-reader. Why should not patriarchs, psalmists, and prophets be tarred with the same brush? To me the inconsistencies of religious people are at times downright horrifying.

Not long ago a Christian lady, a most pious person, said to me that she had lately come across so much abominable conduct in religious professors (and, mind you, she put High Church and Low Church in the same bag—said there was hardly a pin to choose between them in the matter), that now if she had anything to do with one of "the Lord's people," or a very devoted "son of Holy Mother Church," she looked twice as sharp after him, as when dealing with a respectable man of the world. I say it again, sir—'tis no use mincing matters—the children of God often cut a very sorry figure alongside the children of *this* generation, just as Abraham beside heathen Pharaoh, on this occasion; and until such conduct, whether in an

Abraham or a Pecksniff, is scouted as it deserves, matters will never mend.

Vicar.—My dear sir, I have no wish to extenuate the sins of believers—far from it. And as pastor of the flock, of which all present are members, I cordially thank you for enforcing the need of personal holiness. But why not do it in less intemperate language? But now do let us get back to the question before us.

Mr. Shrewd.—But it seems to me the very question. One of the “things” included in the “these things” of the first verse, is Abraham’s disgraceful conduct towards the Lord, towards his wife, towards the king, towards the king’s house, towards everybody in fact connected with the business.

Mr. Oldways.—Excuse me; but really, Mr. Charman, I think my friend Shrewd is trying to get up a storm in a teapot. There may have been a bit of a slip in the Pharaoh affair, but why make such a mountain of a molehill?

Mr. Shrewd.—“Bit of a slip!” “Mountain of a molehill!” I rather think, brother Oldways, you are making a molehill of a mountain. A patriarch, bound to set a first-class example, both to home and heathen, getting his wife to join him in a lie (there are no lies worse, at all events more dangerous, or more mischievous than those which are half true), a lie too which was to put her own purity in peril (a mighty pretty sort of a lie for a husband, of all other men, to

get his own wife to go halves in)—thereby getting too a so-far innocent monarch into a terrible scrape—a mess of “great plagues”—and all to keep his own cowardly skin whole—and you call that “a molehill!” ’Tis more than I can.

Mr. Gentle.—May I venture a word, sir? I can by no means go with all Mr. Shrewd has said of the transaction with King Pharaoh, but I confess to feeling much distressed that this holy man allowed himself to do the same thing a second time in connexion with the King of Gerar.

Mr. Logic.—Yes; and after seeing the effect of that first malfeazance on the *jus tertii* in that case.

Mr. Gentle.—Just so. I think that the memory of the evil he had brought on third parties, on the first occasion, should have remained by him more than it did. We are bound, I think, to make every allowance for him on that occasion, especially when we remember our own frailties and frequent short-comings. But touching the second failure, with every desire to deal leniently with so holy and distinguished a man, it strikes me we cannot do less than adopt Abimelech’s own words (which, by the way, if I may say so without offence, are, albeit Abimelech was the aggrieved party, in marked contrast with Mr. Shrewd’s harsher diction), and say, “Thou hast done deeds which ought not to be done.”

Vicar.—Major Modest, you have not favoured us with your views.

Major Modest.—I rather feel with Mr. Gentle, that this second transaction is deeply regrettable on many grounds. I cannot understand how, as a husband, he could possibly have done what he did. He may have been emboldened, on this second occasion, by Sarah's escape on the first; but this plea could not avail him the first time. Any way, however, his course would seem to have been very unworthy and unmanly, and I fancy we can seldom be unmanly without being ungodly as well.

Mr. Logic.—Really, do you know, I begin to suspect that constitutionally, and apart from the influence of Divine grace, Abraham was a cowardly fellow, who to save himself cared not whom he got into scrapes.

Curate.—Why, Mr. Logic, you are a perfect Manichæan. The Manichæans were very severe on Abraham's cowardice.

Dr. Wellread.—Yes; his cowardice *plus* his prevarication. And that always seemed to me a very lame excuse which Augustine attempts ("Faust." xxii. c. 33),—namely, "that he said she was his sister, without denying that she was his wife; concealing the truth, but not speaking what was false."

Mr. Logic.—No doubt. Is there practically a pin to choose between the *suppressio veri* and the *suggestio falsi*, at any rate when the former is meant to serve all the purposes of the latter? There is much good sense in the great Wesleyan commentator's note on this passage. He asks, "What is a lie?" adding, "it is

any action done or word spoken, whether true or false in itself, which the doer or speaker wishes the observer or hearer to take in a *contrary* sense to that which he knows to be true. It is, in a word, any action done or speech delivered *with the intention to deceive*, though both may be absolutely true and right in themselves." According to this standard Abraham was undoubtedly guilty of an unmistakable lie, and a lie, as Major Modest justly, suggests, which being a *marital* lie has a specially odious and revolting phase attaching to it. And he thereby not only exposed his own wife's person to danger (at a time, too, when I believe some think he ought to have been specially circumspect under this head), but made her his *particeps criminis*, both in incurring that foul risk and in telling the lie which bred it. He thus involved her in distinct personal condemnation; for, says Genesis xx. 17, "she was reproofed."

Dr. Wellread.—I suppose we may accept that rendering. Dr. Kennicott, I believe, renders it, "And in all things speak the truth."

Curate.—And so does the Septuagist, "*καὶ πάντα ἀλήθευσον*," i.e., "deal truly in all things;" but what is that but a reproof, having obvious reference to the equivocation they had agreed on together?

Mr. Humble.—Would you like, sir, to hear what Matthew Henry says? I have copied it out.

Vicar.—By all means.

Mr. Humble (reads).—"His sin in denying his wife,

as before, c. xii. 13, which was not only in itself such an equivocation as bordered on a lie, and which, if admitted as lawful, would be the ruin of human converse, and an inlet to all falsehood, but was also an exposing of the chastity and honour of his wife, which he ought to have been the protector of. But besides this, it had here a two-fold aggravation. (1) That he had been guilty of the same sin before, and been reproved for it, and convinced of the folly of the suggestion which induced him to it; yet he returns to it. (2) That Sarah, as it should seem, was now with child of the promised seed, or at least in expectation of being so quickly, according to the word of God; he ought therefore to have taken particular care of her now." I can't help being afraid, sir, that Abraham acted wrong on this occasion.

Vicar.—I have been revolving Mr. Logic's severe denunciation of the holy patriarch as an abject coward, ready to let any one suffer so he might escape. And I would ask one simple question. Could such a one have so nobly summoned his trained servants to pursue and attack the victorious Chederlaomer and his allies—not, mark it! to recoup any personal losses—but simply to rescue Lot and his property? Was his generous and unselfish conduct in giving Lot the first choice of the whole land—was his earnest and persistent intercession for the cities of the plain,——

Mr. Logic.—My dear sir, permit me one moment. I carefully guarded myself by saying that I suspected

him of being *constitutionally* a coward. I was referring to what I suspected him of being *by nature*, not to what he had become *by grace*. I should deal with his case as with Simon Peter's. What an abject dastard did Peter approve himself when challenged by the servant girl! What a Christian hero when challenged later on by the Authorities! But I venture to think that his constitutional disposition stood revealed much more by the former than by the latter exhibition.

Superintendent.—Yes; I see not why we should not do full justice to Abraham's nobler deeds, while yet feeling duly disgusted with his conduct towards Pharaoh and Abimelech. Just for example, as in the case of David. Of his earlier career, and much of his later, I cherish a lofty admiration; but I overflow with detestation of his conduct to Uriah. I honestly believe that from the murder of Abel to the present hour the annals of human crime comprise nothing so diabolically detestable as David's crimes against that noble fellow.

Vicar.—Ah, me! I fear we can peruse no page of Scripture, with its divine impartiality, no column of a daily journal, with all its human partiality, without meeting fresh proof that the fundamental corruption of human nature is no fond invention of theologians. It must, I fear, be conceded that the patriarch's faith broke grievously down on the sad occasions in question. I remember the learned Bishop Wordsworth regards

the Holy Spirit as having declared that "the artifice to which Abraham and Sarah resorted was not commendable." But our time is well nigh exhausted. I think I must ask the opener to conclude what he has to say. Your great point, I take it, Mr. Shrewd, is this:—that the phrase "after these things" comprehends not only events immediately preceding, but the whole of the patriarch's career, including the regrettable transactions in question.

Curate.—May I just remark that this is in effect Chrysostom's view?

Dr. Wellread.—Oh, yes!—and of many more of the commentators ancient and modern.

Vicar.—Very good. Now, Mr. Shrewd, will you close, please?

Mr. Shrewd.—For the last ten minutes I have been listening with very considerable interest, and no less edification. It seems, sir, that though I am such a bitter accuser of the venerable patriarch, and use such bad language respecting him, I have a goodly number of learned authorities to keep me in countenance. Yes, dear sir, I do opine that "after these things" means that after the way he had disgraced himself it became needful to put him through an ordeal or testing which might lift him on to his legs again, and fit him to be looked up to, in after ages, as a first-rate specimen of superfine faith. And, mind you, dear sir, I further contend that on this occasion there was tested one living man, and one only; to wit—Abraham himself. "The

Lord did tempt Abraham"—no one else. And not only was one man only, but one principle only tested, Faith! Mark it—not obedience, not devotedness, not self-sacrifice, not submission—but faith: F-A-I-T-H! Had these points always been kept full in view, sir, we should never have had written and printed such yards of bosh (excuse me)—some of it revolting, much of it false doctrinal, all of it imaginary—as have been fabricated on the subject. And with that concluding observation, sir, I beg to shut up.

Vicar.—Now one word ere we part.

I cannot disguise from myself that our discussion has led to conclusions which, in a sense, have a little lowered the illustrious patriarch in my merely human esteem. I am not sure, however, that this is any argument against their soundness. The excellency of Divine grace has commonly been deposited in earthen vessels, and very palpable earthen vessels too at times. The Divine choices of persons, like the Divine thoughts and ways in general, have usually been not as ours. I think it very probable that Abraham was not originally and naturally a very estimable person, that not for his good points, or in Scripture language, not for his own righteousness, did the God of glory appear unto him when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran. Of his earlier antecedents, *i.e.* before his selection, and the commencement therefore of gracious operation on him, we have no trace whatever. For aught we know he may have been constitutionally and

naturally as unfitted to become that into which he did mature, as was Saul of Tarsus to become Paul the Apostle. We can only see here as far as Scripture reveals. Taking the information in Genesis as it stands, and not interpreting it according to one's leanings or likings, I am free to confess that up to this time his career had not been such as to make him an illustration of an exceptionally unfaltering faith—of a faith that nothing wavered. Reasoning from the nature of the case, it would appear in a high degree probable, that to remove the blots occasioned by the two grievous falls on which we have been dwelling, the Lord would sooner or later put him through some ordeal fitted to secure this end, and exhibit him as a faith-exercising man in circumstances in which nature must and would throw her whole weight into the opposite scale. We may therefore expect to find, as we advance, that the testing was so arranged as to impose its chief, if not its entire, pressure, as Mr. Shrewd suggests, on the principle of Faith, and not on that of Submission. However, I will not in this direction anticipate discussion. But I must add a word on another topic of solemn moment which, in connexion with the patriarch's conduct, has incidentally presented itself this evening. I mean the evil consequences of an inconsistent walk on the part of professed believers. This is without doubt as serious a question as can challenge our consideration. Mr. Shrewd must pardon my saying that, as usual, he has

put the question somewhat one-sidedly. Which of us cannot lay our finger on cases within our own circle in which, by the grace of God, Profession and Practice (not of course in absolute proficiency) go hand-in-hand? That they form, however, but too limited a minority, I admit. I firmly believe that the progress of our Master's kingdom has in all ages been more impeded by the active and passive wrong-doing of His own people than by any other cause that can be assigned. Christianity made its earlier mark on the world, not as a CREED but as a LIFE—a creed-governed life, no doubt: but it was the life as the result, not the creed as its cause, which really and truly achieved the glorious triumphs of its younger days. In saying this, however, not one particle of sympathy have I with those who, under pretence that the life is all—the belief naught—would discard dogma altogether. To my mind it is simply childish to dream of a Christ-like life apart from dogma. Messianic dogmatism—I speak with reverence—was of a somewhat absolute type. Take as specimens, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”—“No man cometh unto the Father but by Me”—“If ye believe not that I am He ye shall die in your sins”—“Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish;” and so following. But the Divine dogmas did not in Christianity's infancy operate *motu suo*, as it were, but by force of the life which they regulated. And, depend upon it, that whereunto in this matter she then attained, she must

walk by the same rule now. Be assured that only as Christ is formed in us, only in proportion as we in the daily life present a lowly counterpart of what He himself would in thought, word, and deed have been in like circumstances, can we be real Christians, or furtherers of true Christianity.

Wherefore then is it that we have in our day so little of what I am tempted to call Christ-christianity? I believe it to be because of the comparative neglect of secret and solitary fellowship with Himself. There may be—I do not say there is not—a large increase of “outward and visible” Christianity in our day. Church-going abounds, sacraments and other ordinances were never more profusely celebrated; nay, many Romish ceremonies and inventions (I use the terms not reproachfully, but as needfully descriptive) are re-introduced, and thus a semblance of increasing Christianity is got up and presented, which deceives multitudes, especially those not enlightened as to the height and depth and length and breadth of that spirituality which is of the essence of the religion of the Lord Jesus. And think not that professed Evangelicals err not in this matter. Quite as much as Ritualist or Romanist may the Evangelical rest in externals which either wholly supplant, or unduly exceed, those exercises to which two beings, and two only, can be parties; to wit,—God and ourselves. Church and chapel-going, sermon-hearing, Bible-readings, religious conferences, prayer-meetings, as well

as mission-excitements—not to mention salvation armies and the like (in all which we are mixed up with others, and often many others)—comprise and absorb very often the whole religious existence and operations of their patrons. But do not mistake me. Of nearly all such instrumentalities I could say, “These ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.” But what other? What is the resource which I hold to be too much neglected amid the whirl of religious activity rife in our day? I reply, without hesitation—the Secret Chamber; which I believe to be the hidden rock, the unseen foundation (so far of course as instrumentality is concerned), upon which must rest the entire superstructure of outward observance, whether in or out of the sanctuary—if that superstructure is not to resemble, in constitution and destiny, the house not founded on the rock, but on the sand. I regard the Secret Chamber as the vestibule of the sanctuary, at any rate in the case of Christians. In it must be acquired those preparations of heart which alone fit for worship or service out of it. He that entereth not by this door into the sanctuary, but entereth in some other way, will, I am persuaded, suffer for it in the long run. He may, by multiplied church-goings and outward observances, keep up a kind of artificial saintliness, satisfactory enough to himself and his sympathizers, but he will not become rooted and built up in Christ, and in time of temptation will fall away. Bear in mind dear friends, that when formally enacting a

prayer-canon our blessed Lord said not, "And when thou prayest, get thee up to the Temple, or enter into the Synagogue" (rather did He put a comparative veto on all places—synagogues expressly included—where man's eyes could see us); but said He, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret."

I beseech you, dear friends, to lay these things to heart. Would you have your Christianity a living thing—would you be solid, sterling, steadfast, God-glorifying Christians—not Reubens, "unstable as water and never excelling," let the Secret Chamber ever secure the lion's share of the season consecrated to devotion, and use of the Sacred Oracles. Sacrifice hereby what you may of social intercourse, innocent recreation, intellectual development, worldly advancement; at all costs secure for retirement an ample daily interval devoted to the cultivation of that living oneness with the Lord Jesus, which, without it no ordinances will ever tend to sustain, how much soever needing to be seconded by all those outward observances which none the less plainly, because subordinately, Holy Scripture enjoins. I have now, for more than a quarter of a century, risen at five o'clock, winter and summer, for the simple and sole purposes of devotion; and I am fully persuaded that nothing has ever more contributed instrumentally to my health or happiness. I have sometimes detected, flitting through my mind, a hope

that, should the hour ever come when I can thus rise no longer, it may please God to make it also the hour of my departure hence.

But I am detaining you too long.

Let me now mention that, in connexion with other claims on my time and thoughts, I had purposed getting my dear brother and fellow-labourer, Mr. Zealous, to preside on the next two or three occasions.

I have, however, become so much interested in our subject, that I shall make every effort to be present, at any rate, next time.

Our main subject will then be the Command by which the Lord tested the Patriarch. You will perhaps kindly undertake it, Mr. Logic. It will be your turn. As it is a command of startling scope and tenour, which has given great occasion to the adversaries of Revealed Religion to cavil, if not blaspheme, I am sure you will prayerfully weigh anything you may next time bring before us. We will now, as usual, close with the doxology.

EVENING II.

SCENE.—As before.

PRESENT.—The VICAR, CURATE, and SUPERINTENDENT,
with Messrs. LOGIC, GENTLE, WELLEAD, ARTLESS,
HUMBLE, MAJOR MODEST, and SHREWD.

After prayer, as usual, the Vicar remarks. I miss Mr. Oldways this evening.

Mr. Humble.—He will not be here, I fancy, sir. I met him to-day near Temple Bar, and he said he thought he should play truant for once for the meeting seemed to be losing their heads, and getting new-fangled, and he thought he should stay at home and spend the evening with his favourite commentator.

Vicar. Pity he takes that view of the matter.

Mr. Logic.—I fancy our friend Oldways is a little prone to shirk “searching the Scriptures” *in propria persona*, finding it less trouble to take for granted what some commentator of repute says.

Vicar.—Any thing but a right method, however.

Superintendent.—Of course. It just comes to this, that the question such a one is in a position to answer, is not, “Believest thou the Scriptures?” but, “Believest thou so-and-so’s interpretation of them?”

Dr. Wellread.—Besides he roundly ignores the encomium by Inspiration herself pronounced on the Bereans for personally testing by Scripture what one of the foremost of her own representatives had uttered. Surely if an inspired Apostle was not exempt from such a process, no bishop, dean, or doctor of uninspired times should be treated as being so.

Vicar.—No. To “search the Scriptures,” each man for himself, is at once a privilege and an obligation. Free discussion, and ventilation of views cannot but benefit, so long, at least, as they co-exist with reverential regard for the Sacred Oracles, and readiness to bow implicitly to their teaching when finally ascertained. But we must proceed with our subject. Mr. Logic, I believe you open this evening?

Mr. Logic.—Well, sir, I presume we are all aware that this word “tempt” has here no such meaning as places it in collision with James i. 13, “neither tempteth He any man.” The same Hebrew word is continually used in the sense of “testing” or “trying.” For example, Deut. viii. 2 and 16; xiii. 3; xxxiii. 8 (in all which it is rendered “to prove”). In 1 Sam. xvii. 39, it is applied to proving armour.

Dr. Wellread.—Gesenius says the word in its primary sense corresponds with one in Arabic signifying “to smell,” and thence “to test by smelling.”

Curate.—I believe that nearly all the versions adopt the sense “to try” “*tentare*.”

Vicar.—I think we may pass on. There can be no manner of question what the word means here.

Mr. Logic.—Well, then, sir, we arrive at the command itself, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac——"

Vicar.—One moment. Do you not propose glancing at the manner of communication? Much controversy, as you know, has arisen as to whether Abraham had really a just warrant for believing himself authorized to act as he did.

Superintendent.—True. One cannot, for example, help recalling the turn absurdly given to the matter by a once notorious volume, "When the fierce ritual of Syria, with the awe of a Divine voice, bade Abraham slay his son," &c.

Vicar.—But clearly no written law gave under any circumstances, or on any pretence, power to take away the lives of innocent persons. An immediate and extraordinary revelation therefore from God, who only had a plenary right to dispose of the lives of innocent and guilty, could alone supply sufficient authority.

Mr. Shrewd.—As to an extraordinary revelation I am not so clear about that. As to an immediate one, is it not as plain as yonder gas-light that he had that in full tale? Do we not read, "And He" (that is God) said, "Take now thy son," &c.

Mr. Logic.—But is it so easy to settle the matter off-hand by simply quoting those words? You and I

may need no more. But when dealing with doubters or cavillers, we must expect a blank refusal to let such a phrase settle the question *proprio vigore* as it were.

Superintendent.—Yes, I think we must consider the character of the Theophany, if any, on this occasion.

Mr. Shrewd.—And what does that long word mean, Mr. Rule?

Superintendent.—A manifestation of God to man by actual appearance.

Mr. Shrewd.—Then why not say so in plain English? I shall take home a headache if many such long words turn up.

Superintendent.—Long words may make short sentences, Mr. Shrewd. Moreover, I agree with Bishop Lightfoot, when speaking of such words as Theanthropism, hamartiology, soteriology—their value in fixing ideas is enhanced by their strangeness, and excuses any appearance of affectation.

Vicar.—Yes, but we must keep to our point. The question just started by Mr. Rule is not without interest or importance. It may be put thus: Did the Lord now appear anthropomorphously (begging Mr. Shrewd's pardon), which merely means in a form resembling the human, or did He communicate with Abraham in some other of the modes specified by Canon Farrar for example? That divine has remarked, "to Adam God spoke by a voice in the garden borne upon

the wind of the evening—to some of the patriarchs by immediate intuition—to Abraham by inward utterances, by angelic appearances, and so on.”

Artless.—Dr. Hanna, sir, in the “Bible Educator,” says, “The command came in a dream or vision of the night.”

Vicar.—I doubt it. My impression is that in those early ages the Lord almost always manifested Himself, as I have expressed it, anthropomorphously and did so on this occasion. Mark it, I say “almost always.” It was by no means invariably so, possibly to prevent an erroneous conclusion growing up that such an appearance was any part of His own actual personality.

Curate.—I am disposed with Archbishop Tillotson to deem nothing more reasonable than to believe that those to whom God is pleased to make immediate revelations of His will are some way or other assured that they are Divine. How men are thus assured the Archbishop deems it not so easy to make out to others. But, he adds, we are sure that God can work in the mind of man a firm persuasion of the truth of what He reveals and that such a revelation is from Him. This, he continues, no man can doubt of that considers the great power and influence which God who made us and perfectly knows our frame must needs have upon our minds and understanding.

Vicar.—Yes, but we are rather concerned with what God has done than what He could have done had He chosen to do other than He has. But I fear from

his restless manner Mr. Shrewd is getting out of patience with our discussion.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, sir, I have my own private opinion on the subject. All this learned to-do about anthropomorphishness helps me but little. In such matters I let my own heart turn expositor. Not the heart I was born with—its successor—the heart Regeneration set beating. But I never let that heart doff its spectacles the Word, or its leading strings the Holy Spirit's guidance, got by prayer then and there. But I see some would cry "Question!" To cut my say short then. My heart tells me, sir, that I could never have loved, or been content as my God and Lord with a Voice, even though it were good enough to come to me on the wind of the evening. I need something more tangible—more concrete, I think you call it. And I should have found it woefully hard to love and trust an inconceivable, invisible sort of something or someone—with no more form than the wind itself—who should communicate not with me but with my inner consciousness, in some mysterious way not to be made head or tail of. Oh no! this had been a vast deal too abstract for me and my poor capacity, at any rate to begin with. I am gross enough to confess that something more concrete, or if I may so say, body-using would have won my heart better.

Mr. Gentle.—May I intrude a word here? Mr. Shrewd's state of mind seems to correspond with that of some of the ancient fathers. Was it not Tertullian who

could not conceive anything to be real, which was not in some way or other corporeal? And Hengstenberg, too, in our own day, when referring to what he calls "the grosser anthropomorphisms" holds them not altogether to be dispensed with because, as he puts it, the mere "naked idea" of God will leave us unprotected when we most need it. "The thought of God," he says, "may be deposited in the intellect, but will not be interfused with the feelings, inclinations, and passions."

Mr. Shrewd.—Tertullian and Hengstenberg I know about as much of as Tertullian and Hengstenberg knew about me. One thing I know, had I been Adam, or Seth, or Enoch, or any one of that early lot, methinks I should have given three cheers for what you call anthropomorphism, just as now and for the same reasons I say Hosannah for the Incarnation. It gives me, if I may so speak without horrifying anybody, a concrete-Jehovah, a feasible Heavenly-Father, an anti-Abstract Redeemer, of whom I can make something, and between whom and myself there can be something like fellowship, sympathy, confidence, etcetera.

Vicar.—Yes, but you do not mean to imply that the anthropomorphous had about it anything of the august realities of the Incarnation.

Mr. Shrewd.—I simply look upon what that long name signifies as being to the Incarnation what the types and figures of the former *régime* were to the

fulfilment of the present one—the shadow serving till the substance came—a kind of Divine makeshift, *pro tem.* for the Incarnation. No one here more solemnly believes than I do either that God is a Spirit—or that the man Christ Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. But it is the God-man I rejoice in, for without Him I have a very shrewd suspicion that God would have been a very unappreciable, unavailable, and, I had better out with it, unlovable being, at all events to such as I.

Mr. Gentle.—I cannot help, within certain limits, sympathizing with Mr. Shrewd. I have ever found it exceedingly difficult to conceive of a purely Spiritual Being. And if I, living in this advanced period of the world's history, and with the benefit of all the ideas and conceptions originated or developed in the lapse of ages, feel this, how much more overwhelming must have been the difficulty in the earlier stages of human existence !

Superintendent.—Is not the matter well enough put by the late Dr. Barth of Wurtemberg in his Bible Manual, which the meeting will perhaps allow me to read from. After observing that God Himself undertook the education of Abraham, and referring to the number of times that He revealed Himself to him, he adds, “Nor ought we to be astonished that on these occasions He entered into so close a personal relation with the patriarchs as even to share a repast with Abraham, and wrestle in a bodily form with Jacob. Mere human reason,” says he, “looks on such things with scorn, but

if reason would dig more deeply, and argue less superficially than it usually does, it would long ere this have perceived that a correct conception of the personality and omnipresence of the Deity, so far from excluding, necessarily implies such personal appearances as those in question. For, on the one hand, the omnipresence of God is not in all respects uniform. He is near to the believer in a sense totally different from that in which He compasses the ungodly ; and neither, on the other hand, is it absolute, for according to the representations of Scripture, God has also a local habitation which He is free to choose. All which," he continues, "even reason must acknowledge unless indeed it wanders into Pantheism. For the rest, the Lord's eating with Abraham and wrestling with Jacob depend upon the material veil which in these personal manifestations He assumed." And elsewhere he says, "God's speaking to man, which is so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures and at which the wise according to this world take so great offence, is a fact which we to whom He now speaks through His revealed Word and our consciences no more understand than we can that other truth, that He who is a Spirit could call out of nothing the whole of this vast material world. From John i. 18, however, we learn that the Son of God as the Eternal Word was from the beginning likewise His Spokesman, the revealer of His Will to mankind. And the more the condition of man was at the time one of childhood and

minority, the less ought we to wonder at the Divine condescension."

Mr. Humble.—May I read, sir, what Matthew Henry says on Gen. iii. 8, for I suppose it is the same here? "It is supposed that He (the Lord God) came in a human shape, and that He who judged the world now was the same that shall judge the world at the last day—even that man whom God has ordained. He appeared to them now (it should seem) in no other similitude than that in which they had seen Him when He put them into Paradise."

Mr. Logic.—Yes. Many are pleased to carp at the anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament; but could the matter now present itself to our minds *de novo*, I nothing doubt that reasoning from the nature of the case we should recognize the strongest antecedent probability that to our first parents and their earlier posterity, there would be visible manifestations, which would be anthropomorphous.

Curate.—Yes; but we must take care that we do not glide, or cause others to glide, into thoroughgoing anthropomorphism such as the Anthropomorphites so-called held. I suspect a good many of us do this to a greater extent than we are aware of and attribute to the Lord as part of His proper Self the materialism of our own framework, as well as many of our moral idiosyncrasies.

Mr. Logic.—Surely there is no risk of that in this advanced stage of the world's intelligence.

Superintendent.—I don't know that. Look at Hussey of Cambridge, for instance, who taught out and out anthropomorphism as late as the XVII Century, and worse still, take Mormonism. I was not long since looking into a Mormon book called "The Voice of Warning," in which I found this passage, "We worship a God who hath body and parts; who has eyes mouth and ears, and who speaks when and to whom He pleases, who is just as good at mechanical inventions as at any other business." And Joe Smith, their chief prophet, in one of his last sermons said, "God Himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens is a man like unto one of yourselves, that is the great secret. If the veil was rent to-day and the great God who holds this world in its orbit and upholds all things by His power, if you were to see Him to-day, you would see Him in all the person, image, and very form as a man."

Vicar.—If all this be spoken of the Godhead apart from the Incarnation it is of course unmitigated error. But the abuse is no argument against the use. You may abuse the doctrines of Grace to licentiousness. You may abuse the truth that good works are the criteria of future recompense, to the detriment of justification by faith, but the abused truth still remains true. And so I believe there is a scriptural anthropomorphism wholly anterior to the Incarnation, and affording no countenance whatever to the Mormon prophet's position.

Dr. Wellread.—As regards Dr. Barth's contention that correct perceptions of the Divine Personality and Omnipresence would necessitate as their proximate source personal appearances such as we are considering, have not Deistical writers virtually conceded as much. I have here an extract from Anthony Collins's Essay—"Concerning the use of reason in propositions, the evidence whereof depends on human testimony." In it he says, "Was not God to be represented by expressions, which, literally understood, attribute to Him human passions and actions, they who by their occupations in the world are incapable of those more just ideas which men of thought know to belong to that Being, would perhaps think Him incapable of taking cognizance of their actions; and therefore to make a revelation useful and credible in itself, it must consist of words whose literal meaning is false, but whose real meaning is consistent with the justest notions of reason and philosophy." Even Lord Bolingbroke, when ascribing motives to God, admits that "we must speak of God after the manner of men," and, indeed, himself speaks in various parts of his works of the voice, and words, and hands, and ideas of God. And although rather relating to anthropopathisms than to anthropomorphisms, these surely standing or falling together, Collins's remarks and Bolingbroke's, may be taken as covering anthropomorphisms also. Hengstenberg indeed treats the one as being the other in a narrower sense.

Vicar.—But even so Collins would not be going further than Philo, who seems to regard anthropomorphic forms of manifestation as a condescension to the capacities of the rude and ignorant only. But I rather agree with Hengstenberg that, even now in the midst of all the intellectual enlightenment so much talked of, “without them nothing positive can be asserted of God—that he who would get rid of anthropomorphisms loses God entirely, while he tries as much as possible to purify and refine his conceptions of Him and loses all reverence by the illusion of excessive reverence, falling from Anthropomorphism into Nihilism.”

Curate.—But does not Hengstenberg lean somewhat to the notion that the image of God in which man was created was in some measure bodily? Does he not say that the human body is the image of the image of God, and as the original image is reflected in it, so it is suited to be a medium of representation for it?

Superintendent.—I was about asking, sir, how you treat Gen. i. 26. “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” and Gen. i. 27, “in the image of God created He them.”

Vicar.—I think that one text, “God is a Spirit,” suffices to establish that no corporeal resemblance of any sort or kind can be intended. Whether with Socinians generally as well as with Gregory Nyssen we hold that this image consisted alone in having dominion accorded to him—or with others in Adam’s being holy and innocent—or with others in freedom

of will—or with Augustine (according to Bishop Wordsworth) in the incorporeality and individuality of his soul, in its immortality, in its rational intelligence, and other mental faculties, in his freewill, memory, forethought and imagination, which give him a kind of omnipresence; as well as in his moral qualities of holiness and love of what is good—we may, I think, feel quite satisfied that no part of the resemblance related to anything corporeal or material.

Mr. Gentle.—South has a valuable sermon on Gen. i. 27. Briefly, he makes the image to consist in that universal rectitude of all the faculties of the soul by which they stand apt and disposed to their respective offices and operations.

Dr. Wellread.—I have here Barrow's sermon on the same text. In it he says, "That in the soul," which he calls "that interior and invisible principle of operations peculiarly called human, we discern not only *σημεία*, but *ὁμοιώματα* of the Divine existence and efficiency. For example, not only such a sign as is a picture of the painter who drew it, but as is that same picture of its original." He adds elsewhere, "There is scarce any attribute commonly ascribed to God of which some participation, some semblance, is not discernible in man, he being," says he, "indeed a small picture, as it were, wherein God hath drawn and represented Himself." He cites also Seneca's saying of man's soul, that it is "a little God harboured in human body."

Vicar.—But I think we must get back to the question of the manifestation to Abraham on the particular occasion before us in this chapter. Our brother Shrewd, I see, is fast asleep.

Mr. Shrewd (awaking).—I beg the meeting's pardon. I am afraid I have unconsciously dropped off for a few minutes. I was up very early this morning.

Mr. Logic.—Might I interrupt for one moment. Did I rightly understand Mr. Shrewd to ~~mean~~ just now that unless God always communicates with His creatures in some visible shape ~~they~~ cannot be expected to love Him? But in ~~what~~ visible shape has God ever communicated ~~with~~ us?

Mr. Shrewd.—What I meant was this. Had God not ~~cond~~descended to become manifest in the flesh, but, so to speak, kept Himself to Himself, in all His native spirituality, I should have found it very hard work to conceive of Him, believe in Him, love Him, or make anything of Him in any way.

Mr. Logic.—But the Lord Jesus has never been manifest to you in the flesh. Like the rest of us you have to endure as seeing Him who is invisible.

Mr. Shrewd.—My second son some years ago went out to Australia and married there. Every mail since has brought my wife and me an affectionate letter from his wife. She is a most lovable and Christian young woman. We feel we love her every bit as much as we love our eldest boy's wife who lives within a few doors of us. Of course we wish we could see

Tom's wife face to face and embrace her as we can Jack's—and we live in hopes that we shall one day meet even here on earth nevertheless,—

Vicar.—Ah, one can quite well see what our friend means. And I think there is something in it. Using the comparison with reverence, what as to her, are his daughter-in-law's letters, such as to our blessed Lord are His discourses as enshrined in Holy Writ. He has never seen her face in the flesh, and though he longs to do so, and hopes to do so, his affections meanwhile go forth to and embrace her almost as warmly and delightedly as though he had seen her with his bodily eyes. Though a very lowly, I think it by no means an inadequate illustration of our own present position in regard to our blessed Lord. In both cases the underlying humanity of the object of affection, with all its appertaining definiteness, is the starting point in his ability to conceive of and love that object.

Mr. Logic.—Yes, I begin to see, and I think somewhat plainly, that in our own case the Incarnation is certainly the alpha, if it be not the omega also, of our capacity to apprehend and appreciate the God-head. And if so, some kind of anthropomorphic medium might equally for the time be a *sine quâ non* for generations born in pre-Incarnation times.

Vicar.—Just so; at any rate until something equivalent to our own position in having our Lord's history and utterances to go by had become available.

This is perhaps what you meant, Mr. Shrewd, when objecting to my term *extraordinary* as applied to the Divine communication with Abraham on this occasion.

Mr. Shrewd.—Yes ; the Bible seems to me to show that it was quite a common thing for Abraham to be interviewed by the Lord, and have conversations with Him. They were wont to talk together like old friends. If God spake to Moses as a man to his friend, so did He to Abraham. Why there are scores of recorded interviews to say nothing of possible and probable unrevealed ones. Did not the Lord interview Him in Ur of the Chaldees when He bade him pack up and start for the land that He would show him ? Did He not interview him again at Sichem, as well as in Canaan after Lot had taken himself off. Now and then no doubt the Lord, or rather the Word of the Lord, came unto him in a vision, but it was much oftener the Lord *in propria persona*. Did not the Lord thus come to him (on his birthday for aught I know) when he had scored ninety years and nine, and talk a number of matters over with him including his own change of name and the circumcision affair ? Did He not interview him again in the plains of Mamre ? Mind, I am speaking only of recorded interviews. I fancy I could make out a list as long as my arm.

Vicar.—Yes, I think there is great force in what our brother urges. And we must remember that apart from all other, and there might have been many, irresistibly decisive demonstrations that the Being

with whom he thus held intercourse was the Almighty, All-merciful, All-holy Jehovah, his own Creator, Preserver, Guardian, and Guide,—the terrible fulfilment of the threatened vengeance on the cities of the Plain, and the foretold miraculous birth of Isaac, now actually come to pass, were facts which of themselves and by themselves, would render doubt or question on the present occasion simply impossible. I rather like the way the good Knight, their author, puts it in the “*Reliquiæ Wottonianæ*.” He imagines the patriarch “suddenly shaken with an infinite combat between Faith and Nature,” thus discoursing with himself, “‘Yea, thy voice it was (my God) it was thy voice. How can thy humble servant deny it, with whom seven times before descending from the throne of thy glory, thou hast vouchsafed even to commune in this valley of tears.’”

Curate.—Yes; but that seems to make all ~~turn upon~~ a voice. But I apprehend there was almost always a personal presence which Abraham could not fail to recognize.

Mr. Logic.—Yes. It is clear that to meet human powers of apprehension the Lord in those times was pleased to adopt a visible form and plainly, I think, a human one. Among the points which I have privately noted and reserved for consideration when I have time, is this, “Was there not in those earlier ages, and ere written Revelation had been provided, a kind of quasi-Incarnation, or intermittent Incarnation

on the part of the Second Person of the Adorable Trinity?"

Vicar.—I have long since come to the conclusion, even apart from John i. 18, that all the Divine appearances under the Old Testament dispensation were those of the Second Person. Whether the Divine Visitor be for the time being called "God," "the Lord," "the Angel of the Lord," or, as Boothroyd renders it, "the Angel Jehovah," the Person Himself would seem to have been ever the same. But assuming the form to have been the human one, of which I see no reasonable doubt, I should hardly call such an incidental assumption of it an incarnation, especially as ordinary angels no doubt appeared as men.

Curate.—No; to be incarnate and to be anthropomorphic would not have much in common. As to the Divine appearances of the Old Testament, the Christian Fathers, I believe, held almost without exception that all Divine appearances to patriarchs and prophets were manifestations of the Son.

Dr. Wellread.—Was it not a very reasonable surmise of Archbishop Tillotson "that to make way for the credit of future revelations, the first time God appeared to Abraham, because it was a new thing, God did show Himself to him in so glorious a manner as was abundantly to his conviction?"

Vicar.—No doubt. Need we linger any longer over this question?

Mr. Shrewd.—Hear, hear. If we do thus potter

about matters to my humble thinking as plain as A B C we shall all be dead and buried before we get to Mount Moriah.

Mr. Gentle.—I rather feel with Mr. Shrewd that on the face of Holy Writ Abraham's position and procedure are perfectly intelligible and satisfactory. It has been said of the illustrious Leibnitz that "he has rendered many easy things difficult, as well as many difficult ones easy." It has sometimes seemed to me a much easier feat to make the easy hard, than the hard easy. Do we not too often darken counsel by words?

Vicar.—Suppose, then, we proceed to the next topic.

Artless.—I beg pardon, sir, but may I go. I've got to see a gentleman on business at nine o'clock.

Major Modest.—And I, too, must ask to be excused; I have to call for a niece of mine.

Vicar.—Indeed, I think we must all be going. I had no idea it was so late. Before we do separate, however, I should like to say a few words to those who can stay. With regard to the visible manifestations of the Godhead in old times and since, their nature and extent, one thing seems quite certain, namely, that "no man hath seen God at any time." "Him hath no man seen or can see," *i.e.*, Deity, *in propria persona*, using the expression with all reverence, is not now, never was, and never will be visible to such organs, for example, as the human eye.

Under this question, it matters not whether the sublime description in 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16, apply to the Father or the Son (Chrysostom says the former, Alford the latter), in either case it is declared that the Godhead, *quâ* Godhead, is invisible. Stier has said, that as God became man, our Lord "is the visibility of the invisible," but he is constrained to add "as far as and in such way as that may be seen." But can it be seen at all? Can it be seen any further or otherwise than he who sees you or me can see our spirits too? Is it not of the essence of the Invisible, that it cannot be seen under any circumstances whatever? If in any manner, or in any degree, it can be rendered even temporarily visible, it *prô tanto* ceases to be essentially and totally invisible. Zeller, cited by Stier, says, "The Son is ever the visible face of the Father,—rather could we see a man independently of or apart from his face, than we can see God independently of or apart from His Son, who is His face." Be it so, but then (and quite apart for the moment from Atonement's requirements), how momentously indispensable became our Blessed Lord's humanity as a mere medium of manifestation, or rather as *the* one and only manifesting medium which ever has been, or ever will be, available to our own race. In the same proportion how indispensable, until the fulness of time had come, some anthropomorphic substitute; or (if the term be capable of reverential use) some "makeshift," as Mr. Shrewd has called it.

And this I believe to be the true history of the matter. He who from all eternity was in and through His humanity when assumed, pre-ordained to be to created powers of apprehension and perception the only available manifestation of the Godhead, so that to our race in particular he could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," even He was graciously pleased to appear under the Old Testament dispensation in the likeness of man, without being as yet in any wise a man. I cannot, however, with Mr. Logic, regard this as being a quasi-incarnation, or an intermittent incarnation. It had to my mind none of the essential properties of Incarnation about it. It brought Him, as I conceive, into no closer relationship or fellowship with our race than would have resulted had the First or Third Person been augustly pleased to take His place, and adopt the same mode of manifestation. Widely different, infinitely more momentous were the results of Incarnation. That indeed, how hyper-mysterious soever may be the fact, made Him bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, very man as truly and absolutely as very God and, with the single exception of its being ours as it was before not as it was after the Fall, making His human nature the same as Adam's own or Abraham's or Seth's or that of any one now seated in this room. The point, however, before us this evening has simply been the manner of communication adopted by the Lord on the occasion now under consideration. I take it we are all

pretty well agreed that there was a visit and a visible manifestation of a kind with which the patriarch was already perfectly familiar. Their reality he had no more reason for doubting, or right to doubt, than I should have did Mr. Zealous, or one of my churchwardens, call on me to tell me something very startling, but of which they were personally aware—or than had Mr. Cecil's child when, according to the well-known anecdote, her father startled her by telling her to cast into the fire the pearl necklace he had just given her. Hallucination there was none of any sort or kind. In fact, no doubt whatever can exist that the peculiar character of the command and that alone has led so many to contend that Abraham was wrong in crediting that he had received it, or in proceeding to obey it. This, then, *i.e.*, the Command itself will be our subject next time, as it was to have been this evening but it has somehow, to use a railway phrase, got shunted. As Mr. Logic properly has charge of it, I think we must ask him to open it on the next occasion although by rights it would have been Mr. Oldway's turn.

EVENING III.

SCENE.—As before.

PRESENT.—The same parties, excepting only Mr. ZEALOUS engaged elsewhere.

Vicar.—Mr. Logic, as you lost your turn last time, I will call upon you to open this evening. My notes remind me that you have to deal with the Divine Command on this occasion. I would suggest your doing so under these two heads, (1) Its relation to the Lord Himself and, speaking reverently, to the Divine reputation. (2) Its relation to Abraham's own obligations and sensibilities.

Artless.—I beg pardon, sir. Might I just say a word before Mr. Logic begins?

Vicar.—You have no objection, Mr. Logic?

Mr. Logic.—Not the slightest; only too glad to hear anything our young friend has to advance.

Artless.—I thank you, sir. You must know that it is my lot, gentlemen, to work in a large factory, and I'm sorry to say my mates are nearly all to a man infidels; leastways they have all got an infidel turn like. And I assure you, gentlemen, that if it was not for this meeting coming between Sunday and Sunday and setting me up a bit in mid-week like,

I do believe I should get quite crushed up with their arguments and their talk. Nobody knows what a blessing this meeting has been to me. I can't always understand all I hear, but I can understand quite enough to cheer me and make feel that the Bible is after all true and that religion is the right thing to live by and die by. Well, one of my mates, by name Jack Lush, is a sort of a leader among us——

Superintendent.—What sort of character is he?

Artless.—Well, sir, I'm sorry to say he is no great things in that line. He's very fond of the public house and I do hear treats his wife very cruel. They say he does wrong too with other females and that like. But he's wonderful clever, sir. As Tom Chisel said to me this morning, "Blest," he says, "if I don't think Jack could argufy a dog's hind leg off." And he's never so happy as when he's pitching into the Bible.

Vicar.—But what is your particular difficulty just now?

Artless.—Well, sir, he said to me this morning—he knows my ways and doings—"What are you and your Sunday School chums up to now?" Well, I told him we were undertaking the case of Abraham offering up his son Isaac. "Ah," says he, "a nice bit of business that, he says, a pretty sort of a transaction that, for a Divine Deity to be at the top and bottom of. I suppose you're muffed enough to believe it all, he says. Well, I said, I hoped so. "Then," says he, "I shall take you on the *ad omnium*

principle," which I don't quite know what he meant, he's a deal more clever than I am. "But look here," he says, "I've got at home an old book as musty as its matter, and (I heerd from Bob Bompas what you and your religious mates was up to) I've copied out on this foolscap envelope for your edification (the book's called 'Pool's Annotations,'" says he), as follows :—

"Not a word here but might pierce a heart of stone, much more so tender a father as Abraham was. *Take now*, without demurring or delay, I allow thee no time for consideration, thy own proper son, not a beast, not an enemy, a stranger (and so forth, and cætera) *whom thou lovest* peculiarly and superlatively as thine own soul ; *and get thee into the land of Moriah*, a place at a great distance, and to which thou shalt go but leisurely, that thou mayest have thy mind all that while fixed upon that bloody act, which other men's minds can scarce once think of without horror, and so thou mayest offer him in a sort ten thousand times over before thou givest the fatal blow ; *and offer him there* with thine own hands, and cruelly take away the life which thou hast in some sort given him ; *for a burnt offering*, wherein by the law of the burnt offering then known to Abraham, afterwards published to all Israel, his throat was to be cut, his body dissected into quarters, his bowels taken out, as if he had been some notorious traitor and vile malefactor and miscreant, and afterwards he was to be burnt to ashes, that, if possible, there might be nothing left of him." "Now,

what d'ye think of that?" he says. Well, I didn't know what to say. I was took quite aback. I felt very queer. "Now," he says, "look here, young fellow, if your Heavenly Father, as you call him, ever gave such a command as that (which, he says, you can't get away from your own *ipothesos*) your Heavenly Father ought—" but I dare not repeat what he said.

Vicar.—Is the meeting of opinion that such profane balderdash should occupy us here? Can it possibly be good to the use of edifying?

Dr. Wellread.—May it not be the less of two evils to have the whole dragged into the light?

Superintendent.—Especially as our young friend has had to listen to it all, and it has evidently made its impression. We ought, perhaps, for his sake to be content to hear it too. We may be able to apply the antidote.

Vicar.—Well, I confess I have grave doubts about it. However, go on, Artless, go on.

Artless.—"Look here," he says, "I'll settle the whole business before you can say Jack Robinson. I'll settle it, he says, by what we call Nalogy. Nothing, he says, like Nalogy to settle matters of the kind leastways, he says, to thinking minds (which, he says, you haven't got one, and no mistake. Very few of you religious chaps has, he says.) A pretty sort of a way, he says, that, of amusing himself, for any one professing to be in the Divine line. Look here, he says, if I was to catch one of

my young 'uns a-torturing a blue-bottle or a kitten or any live thing, as your Heavenly Father (mind you, he says, by the *ipothesos*) tortured that poor old Jew-party for three days running, wouldn't he get something for himself. Besides, he says, to have to finish up with putting a knife into the young chap, to say nothing of having to cut him up afterwards like Greenacre cutting up what's-her-name after that murder; all mind you, says he, according to *ipothesos*. Look here, he says, I'm that tender-hearted I couldn't stick a pig, and what's sticking a pig to sticking one's own flesh and blood, one's offspring! You hang a poor gal if, in her hour of shame and maddened by her anguish, she finishes her young 'un. Look here, he says (and he doubled his fist and give such a grin) if the old gentleman had 'a done it, and I'd only got the chance of being on the jury, wouldn't I have polished him off at the Old Bailey. And yet, says he, I look upon him as not half so bad as your Heavenly Father. He ought, he says, to be"—

Vicar.—My friends! I really can allow no more of this. Artless, my dear young friend, come to me to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, and we will have some quiet talk and prayer together over this painful subject. Meanwhile, Mr. Logic, I must ask you to proceed with your own treatment of the subject.

Mr. Shrewd.—Excuse me; I've been keeping very quiet this evening. It has been hard work to keep myself in order. But I now protest as in the sight of God,

Mr. Vicar, that it is that learned and reverend and (no doubt) godly divine Matthew Pool, far more than this poor reprobate Jack Lush, who is responsible for what has just defiled our ears. I solemnly aver that there is not in all Scripture a word, a syllable, the foetus of a syllable, giving the shadow of a shade of countenance to the ideas which this wretched man based his blasphemies on. 'Tis Commentator Pool, not Commentator Lush, our obligations on the occasion are due to.

Vicar.—Pray renew not your merciless assaults on the poor commentators.

Mr. Shrewd.—I am their debtor in many ways and I never shirk my debts, but as to swallowing all their conclusions and verdicts I say there are more inventions to be found in their pages than ever were registered at the Patent Office since the hour it opened.

Mr. Humble.—I venture to think, sir, it becomes such as us, at any rate such as some of us, to think more reverently of holy men like Matthew Henry than Mr. Shrewd does.

Dr. Wellread.—Yes, and Chrysostom and St. Augustine——

Mr. Shrewd.—St. Augustine had no more right to add to the Bible than I have.

Superintendent.—But is Exposition addition?

Mr. Shrewd.—Yes, if it sets down to the characters in the Bible feelings they never felt, things they never said, deeds they never dreamt of—all made out of the

commentators' own heads; aye, and as often as not to further some pet creed of their own. All which is bad enough in the case of human characters, but a thousand times worse in the case of God Himself. For example, this outrageous concoction of dear old Pool that Jack Lush has made such blasphemous capital out of. I don't mean that they do it on purpose, or as indictments say of *malice prepense*. In one sense, morally speaking that is, 'tis done in good faith enough, but theologically speaking, in mighty bad faith. The fact is, they are what I call *self-swindled* without knowing it. There's a deal of *self-swindling* in this wicked world, and by means of the Bible, too, most of all when a commentator has a sweet tooth for types.

Vicar.—Types, Mr. Shrewd, are among the most precious provisions made by Inspiration for the edifying of the Church.

Mr. Shrewd.—No doubt, dear sir. I prize types as much as any man. But let them be Inspiration's own, not types trumped up out of Non-inspiration's own head. Commentators over-fond of types seem like women in the matter of flowers. If they can't get the real thing, they'll stick their bonnets full of sham ones. Type-taste is like the greed for relics; it causes manufacture. The demand exceeding the supply, as far as the Bible is concerned, the market gets flooded with a spurious article just as in the case of relics. When I was abroad in a Roman Catholic country, I

found John Baptist credited with over a dozen skulls. I've seen three (falsely so called, of course, but that's neither here nor there). One was smaller than the others I had seen and when I said so I was told that the little one must have belonged to him when he was a boy.

Vicar.—But what has all this to do with our present subject?

Mr. Shrewd.—This, dear sir. In digging and delving all agog for types the commentators have murdered the common humanity of the patriarchs and others without mercy. Take Joseph, for instance.

Vicar.—Mr. Shrewd, we have nothing to do with Joseph this evening.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, but 'tis the same with Abraham and Isaac. In fact it seems to be true of nine commentators out of ten as my dear friend Hosea Biglow so far said of somebody or something else:—

“The moral question's allus plain enough
Its just the human-natur side that's—

turned topsy-turvy by them. How I wish that William Shakespeare and Thomas Scott had gone halves in getting up a commentary; Thomas seeing to the theology and William to what you long-worded gentlemen call the psychology. The poor Bible would have fared a deal better—at all events on what brother Biglow calls “the human-natur side.”

Superintendent.—You go in for Shakespeare then?

Mr. Shrewd.—I do, Mr. Rule. His handywork

like Yorick's skull "smells of mortality," *i.e.*, of humanity in its mortal estate, *alias* unborn again. I can study human nature in him to some purpose. If I converse with old Lear, or peppery young Hotspur, or even that hoary reprobate Falstaff,—(I once when spiritually-speaking in jacket and trousers learned from one of that vile old ram's profanities a most momentous lesson)—I know where I am, I'm conversing with my own species. It's written photography giving objects as they are. Just so, yea more so, when I'm holding intercourse with the patriarchs, that is, the Bible's patriarchs mind you, not the commentators' ! No ; for their versions of these worthies, seem like a lot of typical puppets—no more flesh and blood in them than in a street-Punch, his wife, the constable, or any other member of the Punch company.

Vicar.—Really, Mr. Shrewd—

Mr. Shrewd.—I can't help it. I speak as I feel. Times and often I've said with Tom Cooper the ex-infidel, "Let all the commentators in the world say what they will I must come to nature here. I feel instinctively"—what? Why, that nothing of the sort for the nonce imputed by the commentators to them ever was felt, said, done, or dreamt of by the parties in question. I don't wonder at Bishop Colenso or any one else who contemplates the Bible-worthies through the commentators' spectacles opining that the Pentateuch is not historical.

Dr. Wellread.—Verily, I think our worthy friend is

more oracular than usual this evening. Have a care, dear brother, that you incur not—in principle—that censure which your own favourite commentator Trapp affixes to the Founder of the Familists. “But,” says he, “what a notoriously arrogant fool was Henry Nicholas, that he boasted among his followers in Holland, that he himself ought to be preferred both before Moses and Christ.”

Mr. Shrewd.—Thanks for the compliment, dear sir. But I take it as I know it to be meant, *vide* Proverbs xxvii. 6. God knows I’ve no wish to play the oracle. ’Tis not my place. If I know in this matter anything of that strange mixture which Hosea Biglow calls “Mr. Me,” I can say as he says—

“When I was younger’n wut you see me now—
Nothin’ from Adam’s fall to Huldy’s bonnet
That I warn’t full cocked with my jedgment on it;
But now I’m gitting on in life, I find,
It’s a sight harder to make up my mind.”

Vicar.—But we cannot and must not be further drawn aside by these side-issues. Mr. Logic, pray proceed to deal with the command itself.

Mr. Logic.—But I greatly doubt if time enough be now left us, especially as there are two or three matters of school business to be disposed of. I should propose to adjourn our discussion.

Vicar.—In truth it is much later than I had supposed. Adjourn we needs must. I take great shame to myself for not having kept the meeting more to the point. We met this evening for the

purpose of considering the Divine Command alike in relation to the Lord Himself and to the Patriarch, and what progress have we made in either direction? I really must protest against these constant digressions and desultory discussions of points which however important when in place and in season have really no direct connexion with our particular subject. On the next occasion, if we be all spared, I will ask you, Mr. Logic, to proceed at once with your subject, and I must beg and entreat that no other teacher will raise any question of any kind to interfere with your doing so.

But now, before proceeding to deal with the school-business to which Mr. Logic alludes, I must say a few words on one point on which I should like our younger brethren present to have right views. I mean the all-important matter of Private Judgment. It is sometimes called the *right* of Private Judgment. I prefer to view it as the *duty* of Private Judgment, for a duty it is quite as much as a right if not more so. And there is this advantage in so dealing with it. When canvassing its rights, real or supposed, a fundamentally selfish nature like our own is very apt to go in not for the maximum only of that right but for something very much beyond a maximum. On the other hand, save in the case of a few exceptionally exalted or sanctified individuals, in matters of duty we are prone to reverse the process and content ourselves with a minimum, if not with something unhappily very much below it.

In dealing then with a process so liable as that of Private Judgment to abuse, it would seem safer to regard it as a duty than as a right or privilege—albeit every well-balanced mind, certainly every mind under the domination of Divine Grace, will in every duty discern a privilege—in other words, will account it a privilege to be under the obligation so to obey.

I have said the process of Private Judgment is liable to abuse—I might say to large and lamentable abuse. So are the Doctrines of Grace. By the system known as Antinomianism they have been frightfully and systematically abused. But they remain the Doctrines of Grace still and the only doctrines which accompany salvation. So the duty of Private Judgment remains a duty still, notwithstanding any amount of abuse which can be brought home to its exercise. All Scripture seems to me to proceed upon the basis of, and directly and indirectly to intimate, such a truth. Time will allow only two quotations but they might be multiplied *ad infinitum*. Take our Lord's enactment, "Search the Scriptures." Can it be doubted by any sane student of Scripture that it is addressed to individuals *quâ* individuals, and entails on them an obligation to be individually carried out? What other construction can we place on the inspired praise bestowed on the Bereans for bringing to the bar of Private Judgment the utterances of a veritable Apostle; the test, of course, being Holy Scripture personally interpreted and applied.

Clear as crystal on the pages of the Divine Oracles seems this duty to me to be. Nevertheless, as I have more than once said already, it is through the frailty of our nature liable to alarming abuse and may indeed be wrested by the abuser to his own destruction. What, then, is the remedy or safeguard? Is it to betake ourselves to alternatives unauthorized of God, and originated by frail man himself?—to the alternative of what I would call “third party authority,” whether of some expositor of pre-eminent and just renown, or of some intangible, imaginary (imaginary, at all events, as regards supposed unanimity) body called by that ambiguous name, the Church? On what has come of the former method we need not dwell. We may, however, remark that one result has been that many, without knowing it, treat as veritable Scripture what is the merest tradition. Under this head I commend to your serious consideration what our present Primate Archbishop Tait (whom may God long preserve to England’s Church) said in his inaugural address of the Lecture Session of the Philosophical Institution Edinburgh for 1864—“We must be very cautious not to confound mere traditional expositions of what is contained in Scripture with the Scripture itself. It is astonishing how many statements, historical or scientific, are commonly believed to be in Scripture which, when we examine *for ourselves*, we find are not really there. For example, it is not thoughtless persons only who have but a dim per-

ception of the difference between what we read in the Bible and in Milton. There never was a time" (his Grace added) "when it was more necessary for the honour of the Bible we should make sure that we know what is really in it, and allow it to speak for itself." Respecting what, on the other hand, has come of the second of the two methods hinted at, Roman Catholicism furnishes at once a demonstration and a warning. What, then, is the true safeguard? Suppose you and I had to tread in the darkness a narrow way safe in itself so long as kept to and while traversed lighted-lantern in hand, but having on either side yawning abysses! Should we need more than a lantern that would serve the turn? And have we not, as believers, such a one? Methinks the Bible and that alone presents the needed lantern, in an unlighted state indeed ineffacious; but accompanied by the Spirit's illuminating influence, abundantly equal to all our need. Never then let us seek to use the Holy Scriptures without believing prayer for that illuminative accompaniment, any more than we should try to use lamp or candle without having first lighted it. Thus acting, depend upon it we shall ever, equally with the Psalmist, find God's Word a lamp to our feet and a light unto our paths——

Dr. Wellread.—You don't, of course, mean to the exclusion of human sources of information such as the annotations and commentaries of scholars, divines, and the like?

Vicar.—Most certainly not. Of all such aids it is our duty to avail ourselves with all diligence. Few things I suspect are in their way more offensive to the Lord, certainly are more detrimental to our own progress, than the omission to do this—*i.e.*, supposing we have the capacity and the material. We then have no more right to dispense with such helps than we could have for expecting to find ourselves Philip-wise at some English or Continental Azotus without using travelling facilities. But we should ever as much invoke the Divine blessing on the facilities, so to call them, of mental travel as on those suited to our bodily transit. But for Divine protection in the latter case our train may run off the rails, our steamer founder from collision—even so in the use of commentators, at least where vital doctrine or complex or difficult duty is in question, we may chance to be misguided by them if our ultimate confidence be not in the Divine teaching and “our expectation from God.”

Mr. Gentle.—Your pardon, one moment. May we not assume that Matthew Pool studied Scripture in this spirit and after this manner?

Vicar.—I have no doubt of it. I have no doubt that, speaking generally, his annotations were composed in the spirit of prayer. And what a mass of godly and edifying comment his pages comprise! Suppose he has now and then made a non-fatal slip—what are a few grains of chaff in the midst of such masses of wheat? I think it quite possible, however,

that his prayers, like our own, were at times a trifle too expansive in their generality. I have an impression that if with the particular extract referred to this evening he had happened to deal as Hezekiah with Sennacherib's letter (and considering of whose thoughts and motives he was hazarding an attempted analysis and delineation I think he should have done so), I doubt if he would have finally committed himself to it, for it obviously contains surmises and suggestions in which it is to be regretted he ever indulged, and for which he clearly could have no authority save his own.

Major Modest.—Such slips, to use your own term, Mr. Vicar—are not, methinks, without their value. Where the exaltation of the human intellect and of its assumed capabilities is carried to such excess, as in our own day, even students of Scripture are in danger of reversing that important precept, “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,” and whose mere mind, by the way, may possibly be lodged in no more indestructible habitat. Such “slips” may well serve to show us that no uninspired Teacher, how great soever his attainments and qualifications, is infallible.

Superintendent.—Yes; and may help to keep us alive to the necessity which exists for the exercise of private judgment, whether we will or no. But we are interrupting you, Mr. Faithful.

Vicar.—Oh no. I have little to add. A few days

since I was much amused with the quaint remark of an old college Don of my own university. It was made to an undergraduate who was referring somewhat pretentiously to his acquaintance with the works of Aristotle. Said the older student, "I have gone through them sixteen times already, and am now going through them for the seventeenth, but this time *it is with my coat off*, and I am happy to say a little light is now dawning upon me." Might it not be well if as students of Scripture we were to cast off more completely "our coat" of self-complacent confidence in our own powers, and look oftener and more earnestly upward for the light which cometh down from above? Could my old college superior have enjoyed access to the illustrious Stagirite himself, think you he would not promptly and joyously have sought to learn from the fountain-head the meaning of perplexing or disputed passages? Reverently transferring these things in a figure to ourselves, to whom is vouchsafed fulness of access to a greater than Aristotle, even the Divine Author of the Sacred Oracles Himself, let us not fail diligently and habitually to seek in singleness of heart His guidance and illumination. If we evermore utilize to the uttermost every natural and human means and facility divinely placed within our reach, and as habitually invoke on it the Divine blessing to ensure its becoming effectual to our right edification, we shall never be permitted to stray far from the regions of Truth. Confining the exercise of Private

Judgment within these limits, and rigidly subjecting it to this Divine supervision, rely upon it we shall ever derive from it good, not evil—truth, not error. We shall become rooted and built up in the Truth and in the liberty wherewith it maketh free, whether it be freedom from the yoke and bondage of Roman Catholicism or freedom from the opposite errors whereunto Atheism and Infidelity incline their bondslaves.

And now let us proceed with the School business, which has to be disposed of ere we part.

EVENING IV.

PRESENT.—The same parties, with the addition of Mr. ZEALOUS, and Mr. SENTIMENT SIMPKIN, Secretary to a Benevolent Society.

After prayers, as usual, and welcoming back Mr. Simpkin, who has been absent from indisposition, the Vicar proceeds :—

Vicar.—Now, Mr. Logic, are you prepared to enter on your subject?

Mr. Logic.—Yes, dear sir ; but may I first ask, do you care that I should enter on that *vexata quæstio*, that knotty point, “Whether the obligations of Morality are founded in Nature, and are antecedent to the consideration of a Deity, and independent of any Divine Command ?” as Chubb (but not he alone) puts it in his “Case of Abraham ?”

Mr. Shrewd.—Mr. Chairman, if we are in for anything in that line, you will excuse my wishing you all “Good night.”

Vicar.—Now, Mr. Shrewd, pray remember the understanding come to last time. No one is to interrupt Mr. Logic. Replying, however, to your question, Mr. Logic, I fancy that were we to ventilate the proposition you have broached the entire evening, we should reach no other conclusion than that to

which our instincts (I might almost say, in a moral sense, *vi et armis*) incline us, viz., that of Right and Wrong, the Divine Will was and is, ever must have been, and ever will be the sole origin and the sole criterion.

Mr. Logic.—But what does that cover? Would present Right have been present Wrong, and *vice versâ*, had God so willed?

Mr. Shrewd.—How can we tell? I beg to propose a question quite as much to the point and more practical. Suppose my father had been my aunt, what had been the effect on my present position?

Curate.—Surely, Mr. Shrewd, there is some connexion between Mr. Logic's question and that of the propriety of a Divine command to commit prolicide.

Mr. Shrewd.—The propriety of a Divine command! Mercy on us! Are we, then, a Special Jury impanneled to try the Most High, and judge the Judge of all the Earth? The idea of human beings, whatever may be their thinking powers as compared with monkeys or hedgehogs, appointing themselves to such a function, the thing is preposterous beyond all bearing. Twopenny-halfpenny beings like us—here to-day, gone to-morrow—creatures of yesterday, who only the other day, as it were, were papping and puking, and delighting in such poetry as—

“Ride a cockhorse
To Banbury Cross,
To see an old lady get on a blue horse”—

and in a year or two (as to all but our immortal part, whereof your great thinkers always think least) will be disposed of like dead dogs or cats, except that we may be buried in a box——

Curate.—Mr. Shrewd, pray do not run a muck this fashion.

Mr. Shrewd.—I don't care. The idea of a creature (leastwise since the Fall) born like a wild ass's colt, and who at the early age of three score and ten is in his dotage, giving himself airs, deifying his own brains, and presuming to judge the Lord and His ways, as a man may test a pony and his paces—as poet Pope says, becoming “the God of God,”—I can't endure it. As to fussing about whether right had been wrong, and wrong right had God so seen fit, I say very possibly for ought I know, but I am certain sure He would never have so ruled had it not been the right thing to do.

Mr. Logic.—Then it comes to this, sir, that according to our friend Shrewd (who, by the way, is rather prone to deal in dogmas, as he once remarked of someone else's “home-baked”), we ought to ascribe to the Divine Majesty what has been ascribed to the Pope——

Mr. Shrewd.—Mr. Chairman, I indignantly protest against the Lord and the Pope being named together in the same sentence. If the Pope must be mentioned at all, turn him into a paragraph by himself.

Vicar.—Mr. Shrewd, pardon me. I have now, in compassion to your infirmity (I speak quite good-

humouredly), allowed you to blow off the steam. I must now earnestly beg, and as Chairman expressly rule, that you do not interrupt Mr. Logic again. Mr. Logic, will you proceed?

Mr. Logic.—Well, sir, you are doubtless aware that Bellarmine, according to my notes (in his IV. Book and 5th chapter *De Pontifice Romano*), says, “*Fides Catholica docet omnem virtutem esse bonam, omne vitium esse malum. Si autem erraret Papa, precipiendo vitia, vel prohibendo virtutes, teneretur ecclesia credere vitia esse bona, et virtutes malas, nisi vellet contra conscientiam peccare.*” The latter clause I presume we may render thus,—“But if the Pope should err by endorsing vices or prohibiting virtues, the Church would be bound to believe the vices to be good, and the virtues to be bad, unless minded to sin against conscience.”

Curate.—Verily, after that I cannot help but commend our friend Shrewd’s abhorrence of a certain system.

Vicar.—But that is not the question before us. You observe, Mr. Logic, that Bellarmine (consistently enough no doubt, the probability being no remote one) says, “If the Pope should err,” in other words, In error decree as suggested. But of error our infinitely wise Creator is incapable.

Mr. Shrewd.—Then why not start from that point? What on earth is the good of speculating as to what might have been, if it cannot now be, the opposite

having happened? I neither know nor care whether what is now wrong might (D.V.) have once been right. I should as soon think of wasting time over such questions as "Suppose God had not been God," or "Suppose my umbrella had been a mushroom?" It is not a mushroom and it is an umbrella. I start from that point and act accordingly.

Vicar.—Mr. Shrewd, I put it to your own sense of propriety whether these continued interruptions on your part after my repeated remonstrances——

Mr. Logic.—May I be allowed a word, sir? I almost think we shall ensure a fuller ventilation of our subject by dealing with it conversationally. If therefore you will allow me to forego my right to deal with it in an orderly manner I shall feel obliged. I can before we close readily add anything which may have occurred to myself and not been previously noted by other speakers.

Vicar.—By all means, if you personally wish it, Mr. Logic. But I am getting to feel a mortal dread of the endless digressions in which a conversational treatment of our subjects seems evermore to land us.

Mr. Logic.—What I want to come to is this. Does Mr. Shrewd hold that God is, as some affirm, *ex-lex*, without and above all law?

Mr. Shrewd.—I should think I do—all except His own, or what I should call Self-law. He is, what none of us must try at being, "a law unto Himself." All things must have taken their rise from Him, law

included. But His law is so super-excellent, so preter-perfect, in a manner of speaking, so like Himself, that it never needs revising or amending, like man-made law. Nevertheless, He may see fit now and then to suspend it for special reasons, and then, what were otherwise very wrong, becomes for the nonce very right, as in this splendid instance of commanded son-killing.

Superintendent.—Now wait a moment, Mr. Shrewd. To put matters somewhat after your own fashion, I trust without irreverence—Is it conceivable that God could render it right for A B to debauch C D's wife, decoy away his maid-servant, carry off, kill, and eat his ox, and drive away and sell his ass, pocketing the price, simply by giving him a command to do it?

Mr. Shrewd.—God forbid! Why it borders on blasphemy even to suppose such a supposition.

Mr. Logic.—Yes, but why, Mr. Shrewd, why? Mr. Rule's test appears to me a perfectly fair one. It would not be difficult to paint the act of cold-bloodedly imbruing one's hands in one's own offspring's blood, behind his poor mother's back, so as to make it look far more revolting than any of the atrocities involved in Mr. Rule's hypothetical case.

Mr. Shrewd.—But what good could come of such doings as Mr. Rule supposes? It looks like imputing to our Heavenly Father that He could command A B to do a lot of wanton wrong-doing without rhyme or reason.

Dr. Wellread.—Yes; or as that writer, Chubb, quoted more than once this evening, expresses it, “A command for commanding’s sake.”

Mr. Logic.—Very good; I object not to that view of the matter. But mark, our friend Shrewd is thereby brought to this, that we cannot stand on the Divine source of the command alone, but must needs subject the command to the *cui bono* test? And this is where it has in my judgment received such unfair treatment at the hands of sceptics and objectors. The argumentative injustice to which it has been subjected resembles that of which Hume was guilty when, in his attack on the Evidences of Christianity, he contended that we were not obliged to consider “how the Story arose.” This command has often been treated according to its internal tenor alone, without reference to its surroundings, to the Divine object and aim in giving it, and to the effects likely to flow from it. All which is to render any conclusion on the subject as non-reliable as would be an estimate of the tragedy of King Lear, after wholly striking out the part of Cordelia. Of course, influenced by the instincts implanted at regeneration, the children of God may, *quoad* Reason’s illuminations, feel quite as satisfied in the dark as in the light that all is well, but if the matter is to be argued out and handled rationally, we must look at the end contemplated in a command which *primâ facie* undoubtedly constitutes *pro tanto* and *pro tem.* a violation of the Sixth Commandment.

Major Modest.—But will the end ever justify the means, if the means be of its own nature evil?

Mr. Logic.—Certainly not. But in the case before us the means has ceased to be evil by virtue of the command.

Major Modest.—Then where is the difficulty in the case put by Mr. Rule?

Mr. Logic.—The absence of any justifying or hallowing end whatsoever. 'Tis impossible to conceive of any good end being served by the adultery and pillage which his supposed example suggests.

Mr. Gentle.—I think, dear sir, we must be content to concur in the proposition you broached at starting. You referred to our instincts. I must confess I feel intuitively, even by irresistible intuition, that the Lord is the source and judge, and very Lord of the fitness of things. In no sense is He the subject or obligor (if I may so speak) of that fitness. In other words, and as you expressed it, of Right and Wrong the Divine Will was, is, and ever must have been, the sole origin and sole criterion.

Superintendent.—It has, however, been said, I believe by Dugald Stuart for one, that “if moral distinctions be not immutable and eternal it is absurd to speak of the goodness or of the justice of God.”

Mr. Shrewd.—But who doubts their being both? I don't; but only because God is both. Jehovah has from everlasting had His own views, opinions, and notions, which have therefore, as a matter of course,

been all right, and anything the other way all wrong. And He has never altered one of them. He is the Lord Jehovah—He changes not. Well, then, are such (what's that long word—oh, I have it) ephemeral chits as we, or Professor Bladderbrains, or Jack Lush, that Artless spoke of the other evening—are we, forsooth, to try and find out, or demand to know, how He came by them. He was never without them; that is near enough for us. They are just as old, *alias* as eternal, as Himself. You can't have eternal, more eternal, most eternal! Very well, then, the ideas of Right and Wrong, the principles of Right and Wrong, the standards of Right and Wrong—whatever you please to call them—however eternal they may be, can't be older than God. Besides, right and wrong are not made of flesh and blood or plaster of Paris. They are qualities. They depend on being perceived and performed. You can't have them at all unless there is some one to know which is which, as well as somebody to do the one or the other. At all events, you must have some one to know which would be which when there should be somebody to do one or the other. I say they could not be at all unless there was such a doer forthcoming. How could there be that wrong thing murder, until there was some one to murder and be murdered? How could the Tenth Commandment come into force until there was some one in being who could covet?

Curate.—I think there is something in what our

friend urges. Dr. Clarké, as we know, argues that "as immensity and eternity are not substances, they must be the attributes of a being who is necessarily immense and eternal." Why may not moral distinctions stand on the same footing? Why may not rectitude (wrongness is only its opposite) be an attribute.

Superintendent.—Except that the rectitude we are practically concerned with is matter of conduct,—not the Divine conduct necessarily, but rather that of the creature,—and conduct has respect to a moral standard, which such attributes as immensity and eternity have not.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, I'm not sure I fathom all this pro-and-conning. It seems to me you are for making the Lord Jehovah subject to some law or standard, going against which at any time He makes Himself a transgressor. That won't do for me! I say, "Let Him do what seemeth Him good!"

Vicar.—I can't help thinking with Dr. Reid that all speculations of the kind, how superior soever the genius of those who attempt them, are apt to become more sublime than solid. Is it not inevitable that speculations by intelligences of finite capacity, and non-eternal duration, respecting the unrevealed modes of judgment or action of the Infinite and Eternal Supreme Being, must needs become what the same Doctor calls "the wanderings of imagination in a region beyond the limits of human understanding."

Mr. Shrewd.—Hear, hear! Then, dear sir, to use

a workman's phrase, "Give 'em all the sack," and for the rest of the evening let us be practical.

Dr. Wellread.—Is it not time that we accepted the position that from God Himself takes all law its rise and emanation, and that if He choose for special reasons to suspend temporarily any particular enactment, it is but reasonable and decent for us to say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Superintendent.—Hear, hear! And hence that antecedently to a full consideration (a feat not always within our finite reach) of those reasons, in other words of all the particular circumstances under which it issues, and the purpose and object it is designed to subserve, no alleged command how improbable or startling soever *primâ facie*, can rationally be pronounced impossible or improper to have been given.

Vicar.—Well, Mr. Logic, do you go with this?

Mr. Logic.—Yes, I think so, on the whole. By the way, some one present spoke of the Lord being governed by Self-law, and that alone. I am quite prepared to allow that the primitive rules of His economy in this world and elsewhere, are solely the results of an absolute will, but I must contend that they are none the less the sacred decrees of that we understand by reason and goodness, though of course this may be because reason and goodness are part and parcel of Himself, and He cannot but will and do in harmony with Himself.

Vicar.—Or may it not be put that they are

necessarily in accordance with reason and goodness, reason and goodness being reason and goodness, simply because He has constituted them such, and constituted us incapable of deeming anything reason and goodness but themselves?

Dr. Wellread.—And may we not safely assume that God acts at least by one invariable, universally invariable rule, viz., a rule which contemplates the welfare and happiness of the whole universe as over-ridden by His jurisdiction?

Ourate.—Yes; but I have also a suspicion that God never on any occasion, or under any circumstances, requires any individual's obedience to what would militate against his own eternal welfare. I say his eternal welfare, for as to his temporal, much that militates against that is the best thing possible for man's eternal weal.

Vicar.—Any other gentleman any remark to offer?

Mr. Humble.—Might I humbly observe, sir, as to this command of the Lord to Abraham, which some people make out to be so horrible and improper, that God never meant it to be carried out.

Vicar.—That is an important remark, Mr. Humble, in its bearing on the perverse contention of some that the command involved the virtual sanction of, and possibly originated, human sacrifices, but I doubt if it meets any supposed difficulty in other respects connected with the command.

Mr. Logic.—Just so. The propriety of the command, *quâ* command, must undoubtedly be determined by its own scope and tenor, not by its ultimate non-fulfilment, otherwise a sceptic might turn the tables on us by saying that the command was too bad to admit of being carried out, and therefore had to be revoked. I do not myself see that the difficulty (if any) in this direction would have been at all enhanced by the actual immolation of Isaac—at any rate if followed by resuscitation.

Mr. Gentle.—You alluded just now, sir, to the imputed connexion of this command with heathen human sacrifices. Some present may not be aware that in the Phœnician traditions (as preserved from the Phœnician Sanchoniatho, by Philo Byblius), King Cronus—called by the Phœnicians Israel—having an only son named Jehoud (even now says Eusebius, the name for “only begotten” amongst the Phœnicians), when war was impending offered up his son, clothed in royal apparel, on an altar which he had built.

Vicar.—Yes; and the attempted immolation of Iphigenia by her father Agamemnon, has an interest for us in connexion with the subject, especially as she was spared at the last moment and a stag, I think it was, sacrificed in her stead.

Curate.—Do not some make the substitute a she bear?

Dr. Wellread.—Yes; and others a bull; while some,

as if determined to have a human sacrifice after all, insinuate that an old woman was substituted.

Vicar.—Well, Euripides makes it a hind. But we must get back to our point.

Artless.—May I respectfully mention, sir, that my fellow-workman Lush, spoke of the other night, said to me to-day, that he was reading about the offerings of Huckyzuckypoxeye, or some such name, out in Mexico, I think he said——

Vicar.—He meant, perhaps, the Aztec deity Huitzilopochli, the Mars or war god of Mexico.

Artless.—Yes; I think that was the name, and he said that Bernal somebody had wrote a letter home to say that about three or four thousand human beings were sacrificed per annum in this sort of way—and mind you, he says—I set every man-jack of them murdered parties down to the Bible. That Abraham and Isaac job, he says, is responsible for the 'ole lot.

Curate.—What can be more shamefully perverse? Even should we allow that the earlier stage of the transaction seemed *pro tempore* to amount to a sanction, can any more conclusive cancellation of it be imagined than the prohibition, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him?”

Superintendent.—Especially as a sacrificial act after all crowned the transaction, the victim being the substituted ram.

Vicar.—Yes; even Freethinkers have allowed as

much. Chubb the Deist, for example, already referred to this evening, expressly says (xi. 227), "God gave the command not with an intent that it should be obeyed, but that he might take occasion from it to show to Abraham, and to all his posterity, the unfitness of all human sacrifices."

Artless.—No gentleman has yet said anything about how poor Abraham felt when this command came upon him—about his feelings, and his sufferings, and his afflictions all that three days.

Vicar.—No; that belongs to our second head, on which we have not time to enter to-night. Mr. Simpkin, it will be your turn to open next time. Will you kindly prepare to deal with the relation of the Commandment to the Patriarch's obligations and sensibilities?

Mr. Simpkin.—With much pleasure, sir.

Vicar.—Before we separate, I should like to say a few words on one or two of the points which have occupied us this evening.

Strong observations have been made as to our right and capacity to deal at all with abstruse and hard questions, such as the origin or foundation of moral distinctions. Than myself none can more lament the intellect-idolatry of the present age. To my mind painful proofs on all hands abound that the ancient apostolic description "Whose God is their belly," might be not unduly varied into "Whose God

is their brains." There are other dogmas and dogmatists than those theology furnishes. I have often wished the dogmatists of science would lay to heart what Göethe has said in the second part of "Faust."

"Herein I recognize the high-learn'd man.
What *you* have never handled no man can;
What *you* can't grasp is sheer non-entity;
What *you* cannot account for, cannot be;
What *your* scales have not proved can have no weight;
What *you've* not stamped, can never circulate."

On the other hand, in the rebound from this evil tendency we may lapse into the other extreme of not adequately utilizing or applying those mental powers which, equally with all other faculties and capabilities, are given that they may be zealously employed for promoting the Divine glory, not wrapped in a napkin, or hidden in the earth.

If I remember rightly, it was Socrates who, even with reference to the natural world and its phenomena, held it to be presumptuous impiety, offensive to the gods from whom, as he viewed it, that natural world's problems were unavoidably concealed, to attempt to pry into them. Was Newton, then, a wrong-doer because he ventured, and successfully ventured, on those God-glorifying investigations of Nature's secrets, whose scope and extent doubtless went immeasurably beyond anything it ever entered the mind of Socrates to conceive of? Nor let us ignore that remark of Bacon's—"In men's despair and idea of impos-

sibility is to be found by far the greatest obstacle to the advancement of the sciences,"—a remark which, *mutatis mutandis*, may, I think, be some times fairly applied to inquiries in moral philosophy also.

In all such exercises one great preservative against excess on the one hand, and defect on the other (the ever-present Scylla and Charybdis, between which we are called to steer throughout our life-voyage from cradle to grave), is, in whatsoever we do in the way of speculation, inquiry, and research, on such subjects, to take care to do all to the glory of God, and with no desire to be wise above that which is written.

Another preservative would be not merely to admit theoretically, but to realize experimentally, our own constitutional insufficiency for such indagations save within the most moderate limits. Let us never forget Laplace's saying, "Our ignorance is immense." And in what direction can this ignorance and infirmity possibly hamper us more than when dealing with any question directly or indirectly involving what we call, and perhaps erroneously imagine we can definitely conceive of, viz., Eternity. If, as Sir Henry Holland has well observed, "Even where science seems most complete, as in that great law of gravitation, which has told the existence and the place of a new planet from the perturbations of one before known, there is always an unanswered question beneath, What is gravitation

itself?" how much more inevitably must we expect to find ourselves out of our depth when endeavouring to probe the origin of that which is confessedly eternal, and which, unlike matter, presents no properties or phenomena which science can see and handle, or submit to tests and experiment?

Thus must it fare with us in regard to that difficult question, "The Source of Moral Fitness,"—is the Sovereign Will and pleasure of God that source,—or some originally, I had almost said eternally, existing property inherent in the *nature* and the *relation of things*? Is it a fitness, to repeat a definition already referred to this evening, antecedent to and independent of any Divine or human determination concerning them?

All present can, I trust, from the bottom of their hearts say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," and also instinctively feel that in one way or other (though in what way it may transcend our limited capacity to define) the Sovereign Will and pleasure of God is the sole original source of all moral distinctions—of all that we discriminate or regard as Right and Wrong.

For myself I reason thus :—

Suppose it had pleased the Almighty Father to dwell from everlasting to everlasting in self-satisfying, self-beatified solitude—His own perfections His all-sufficient portion. In that case how could Justice, Goodness, Mercy, Love, &c., have existed at all—except

of course potentially? I cannot, therefore, quite see with Dugald Stuart, and other learned writers of his School, that "if moral distinctions be not immutable and *eternal* (immutable I can readily conceive their being, but not eternal), it is absurd to speak of the goodness or of the justice of God." Eternally potential they may have been, but eternally actual I cannot even conceive their having been. Does not common sense teach that there must be objects towards which the dispositions in question can be displayed before their potentiality can possibly pass into the actually existent?

When, then, the Almighty proceeded to create Intelligences (whether angelic or human matters not) capable of fearing, loving, &c., can anything appear more irresistibly certain than that He would so constitute them that they should like and loathe, love and hate, seek and shun, according to instincts and biasses implanted by Himself, as part and parcel of their moral mechanism as He had planned it? Moral fitness would then come into play, not to say being, as consisting in conformity to the dictates of these instincts and biasses. What psychologists call the "Moral Sense," and theologians the "Conscience," I take to have been as much an item in the list of constituents which the Great Designer designed the human nature should comprise, as the brain with its thought-powers, the heart with its affection-functions, or the digestive organs with their uses; it, as much as

these, can only work in the grooves, or line of direction, settled by the Great Creator Himself in the hour of creation. The fact seems plain to me that He has seen fit to implant in us a sense of right and wrong which, even in our fallen state, and as to a great many matters (not that it is not capable of depravation and perversion in certain circumstances) is as uncontrollable in its conclusions as the perception that two and two make four, or that a thing cannot both exist and not exist at one and the same moment——

Mr. Logic.—I beg pardon for one moment. The great difficulty here is that what (viz., attempted or purposed prolicide) had been up to this hour confessedly wrong, and contrary to the Sixth Commandment, now became quite right, in fact exemplarily so, by virtue of the present injunction. *Pró tanto*, therefore, we have here a transformation of Wrong into Right simply and solely by force of the Divine Will and pleasure.

Vicar.—Just so; and so far the transaction would seem to prove conclusively that the Divine Will is the original and absolute source and the sole regulator of what is right. Mark the way in which you yourself, instinctively as it were, put it. You said “contrary to the Sixth Commandment,” not to some eternal, self-existent standard outside God and independent of Him. And when you say “a transformation of wrong into right,” do you mean more than such a kind of transformation as you and I might effect when making

the insecure secure by the addition of what renders it so; or as the Legislature effects when it makes the hitherto non-lawful become lawful by passing an act for the purpose?

Dr. Wellread.—But the Legislature could not by Act of Parliament make it lawful for me to kill my son.

Vicar.—No, because it would be contravening a law higher than its own; but there is no law higher than the Divine. The truth is, we may argue for a century, and, whether we will or no, still find ourselves brought back to the conviction, well-nigh as irresistible as that the whole is greater than its part, that God's Will, and that alone, is the sole originator of Right and Wrong. When godly men like Abraham say Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? they virtually, though not perhaps consciously, mean, Shall He not act in accordance with those implanted instincts and enacted rules which He has Himself set in operation from the beginning. And hence, whether they themselves see it or not, comes the conclusion in any and every case, that "whatsoever is, is right," provided only there be no doubt that God is endorsing it. Thus, on the present occasion, having no more doubt that he had been talking with God during the late interview than that he had been talking with Sarah at their last meal, Abraham staggered not at the mandate because of what was strange or repulsive about it. He, doubtless, instinctively felt that that was no business of his. He may

or may not have had some insight into the *cui bono* considerations pertaining to the transaction——

Mr. Shrewd.—At any rate I have no doubt he felt it was a very easy command to obey.

Vicar.—Easy! What, to himself?

All.—Did you say easy?

Curate.—Our friend has just woke up out of one of his refreshing little snoozes.

Vicar.—At any rate (I have an important engagement elsewhere), we must now separate, reserving anything further till next time. Let us now close our meeting in the usual manner.

EVENING V.

PRESENT.—The same parties with the addition of Mr.
OLDWAYS.

After prayer, as usual, the Vicar observes, Glad to see you back again, Mr. Oldways. I feared you had taken a final leave of us.

Mr. Oldways.—No, sir, not exactly that. I stayed away one night for my own reasons, but the second time *me* and Mrs. O. went out to dinner, and last time I had such a violent cold I was obliged to lay up altogether.

Vicar.—Mr. Simpkin, I believe you begin this evening. Our first topic is the bearing of this command on Abraham himself, *i.e.* on his sensibilities.

Mr. Simpkin.—Well, sir, the subject is one full of the most touching interest. It has been truly said that none but a parent knows what a parent's feelings are. I have not yet the honour and privilege of being a married person, and therefore much fear that I shall be unable to do full justice to the touching theme. Even at this distance of time, when so many centuries have come and gone, the heart seems to bleed anew every time we proceed to contemplate the subject's affecting

phases. If it be our duty to "weep with those that weep," I should say, sir, that never since the world began could anyone have better deserved or more needed the co-operation of our tears than the venerable patriarch on this afflictive occasion. It strikes me, sir, that we cannot better arrive at what this much-exercised parent felt, suffered, experienced, and endured than by noting, to begin with, what good Bishop Hall tells us when he beautifully observes, "Never any gold was tried in so hot a fire; who but Abraham would not have expostulated with God"—

Vicar.—I beg your pardon; but is not the bishop there rather expressing what Abraham did *not* feel than the reverse. He is rather hinting at what any but Abraham would have done.

Mr. Simpkin.—But what would that have to do with it, sir?

Vicar.—Well, it might be valuable as showing what the natural heart might experience in like circumstances, when not sustained by such faith as Abraham's. But, if my memory serves me, the good bishop adds something to the effect that such thoughts would have been the thoughts of a weak heart; but that Abraham in "a holy wilfulness" (I think he calls it), "either forgets or despises Nature; and cares nothing about the means because of the end." I am not sure I give his words, but that is the substance.

Mr. Simpkin.—Oh dear! I can hardly think that, sir. I take in the "Bible Educator," and at page

85, Vol. I, the Rev. Dr. Hanna dwells on his "inward agony," and "the terrible secret lying heavy on his heart all through the three long days of travel." I have got also the "Bible Manual," in which Dr. Barth speaks of "the darkness that weighed on his soul,"—"of the heart-piercing question of Isaac"—"of the moment in which his anguish of heart and trouble of soul reached their height," and of his "three days darkness," and so forth. Oh! dear, I should not like to feel that he bore the thing with equanimity. I know that again and again, sir, both in church and chapel, I have heard clergy and ministers dwell most piteously on his agonies. They have brought tears into the eyes of many of their hearers.

Mr. Shrewd.—Ah! it's right enough you are there, brother Simpkin,—so have I. And knowing how little there was in Holy Scripture to justify the preacher's flummery, my nerves have got so irritated, the old Adam has actually wanted me to fling my hymn-book at him. I don't say I ever did but I have felt much disposed to.

Mr. Simpkin.—Do you know, sir, I feel rather brought to a stand-still. I have been thinking so much of the poor Patriarch's sufferings, and sympathizing so much with him in them that I scarcely know where I am after what has now been hinted at. Perhaps some other gentleman will kindly go on with the **subject**.

Vicar.—You seem to have **something** there, Artless—what is it?

Artless.—My old grandmother, sir, has got a most beautiful book called “Orton’s Short and Plain Exposition of the Old Testament,” and he gives in a most beautiful sort of a manner all Abraham’s feelings and observations. It’s rather long, but there isn’t a word that ain’t most affecting—enough to bring tears into anybody’s eyes. I’ve copied out the most touching points, as follows :—

Says the poor old gentleman, “Lord, must I lose my child—lose him almost as soon as I have received him? Didst thou give him only to tantalize thy servant?” And then he goes on, so piteous, “If nothing will avert thy indignation but human blood, let my death be the sacrifice: upon me be the vengeance.” A while after he says (and, oh dear! it’s enough to make one’s heart break), “If it must be a blooming youth in the prime of his strength, be pleased to fetch it from some fruitful family; there are those who have many, while I have but this one little lamb, the solace of my soul, the stay of my declining years, and shall this be taken away while all those are left? Or, if the decree cannot be reversed, if it must be the fruit of my body, O that it might be Ishmael, the son of my handmaid.” And after all this, he says, “If my Isaac must be bound hand and foot for the slaughter, if he must receive the steel into his bosom and welter in his innocent blood, Heaven forbid that I should behold so dismal a spectacle,” and then somebody remarks, but I have forgot to put who, “Alas! Abraham, this mitigation cannot be granted:

thy own hand must point the deadly weapon at his breast, and urge its way through the gushing veins, and shivering flesh, till it be plunged in the throbbing heart—the father—the father must be the executioner.”

O dear ! it's very affecting.

Mr. Logic.—I am unwilling to interrupt our young friend, but is not all this pure fabrication and as such wholly beside the purpose ?

Artless.—But is it not, sir, just what a poor father would feel and say at such a time. It seems so natural.

Mr. Humble.—Might I, honoured sir, here read what the beloved Matthew Henry has said. I have copied it out on purpose. He says, “ This command is given him in such aggravating language as makes the temptation abundantly more grievous. When God speaks, Abraham no doubt takes notice of every word, and listens attentively to it; and every word here is a sword in his bones ; the trial is steeled with trying phrases. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that He should afflict ? No, it is not—yet when Abraham's faith is to be tried God seems to take pleasure in the aggravation of the trial.”

Dr. Wellread.—Calvin's comments, too, I daresay you are aware, Mr. Chairman, run in the same groove. “ As if it were not enough,” he says, “ to command in one word the sacrifice of his son, he pierces as with fresh strokes the mind of the holy man. By calling him his *only* son he again irritates the wound recently inflicted by the banishment of the other son ; he then looks for-

ward into futurity, because no hope of offspring would remain. If the death of a first-born son is wont to be grievous, what must the mourning of Abraham be?" — and so he goes on.

Vicar.—Now, Mr. Shrewd, can you help us in any way?

Mr. Shrewd.—Sir, I declare with all solemnity, with all reverence, all deliberation, that, given the same faith—mind that, given the same faith, in kind and *quantum*—all turns on that—yes, I say, given the same faith, and I'd rather have to do, twice over, what Abraham was told, than what I had last week to do in the case of a dear invalid daughter of mine.

Superintendent.—Have you been turning modern Agamemnon?

Mr. Shrewd.—Be as jocose as you please, dear Mr. Rule—it won't move me. I repeat, that given the same faith, I'd rather have to do what Abraham was told to do to his boy than what I had to do last week in regard to my poor girl.

Vicar.—But what could that be?

Mr. Shrewd.—I foresee that seventy-five per cent. of those present will go off on the giggle. No matter. Truth's truth, let who will grin. You must know, sir, that my poor dear child suffers terribly with her teeth—has done from her cradle. Lately one of her double-teeth has led her a perfect martyrdom. And her teeth have such fangs. Dragging an oak out of the earth would seem nothing to it. Poor dear soul! And then her

heart is in that state you can't chloroform her. But out the tooth had to come, and what I suffered all the night before! I never got a wink of sleep all night for thinking of it and praying for her. And all the way to the dentist's next day, as I looked upon her poor wan face, and knew what she was suffering in the prospect, I suffered too. She's a good girl and a brave, and she knows where to look for strength, but let no one, blessed with a hale constitution and sound teeth, make light of gum-anguish such as hers—I can only say I'd have given anything to change with Abraham.

Vicar.—I am far from wishing to make light of your illustration, Mr. Shrewd, but what possible parallelism can there be between that case and the case of having to put an only child to death, or between the mental anguish respectively incident to the two occasions.

Mr. Shrewd.—I can see no reason in Scripture or out of it why Abraham should not have been as cool as a cucumber throughout the whole of his affair.

Vicar.—Now, pardon me. Do you seriously mean to assert your belief that the Patriarch could possibly go through such an ordeal with absolute *sang froid*?

Mr. Shrewd.—No, not exactly that. But I do believe, and I do mean to suggest, that he went through it with the greatest satisfaction, not to say delight.

Several voices.—How can you talk so?

Mr. Shrewd.—Then give me Scripture to the contrary. I will bow to nothing but Scripture. I don't

care if a dozen Augustines with a dozen Chrysostoms atop of them, and a dozen Tertullians atop of that say so, if it is not in the Bible I won't receive it. I see more reason every day I live for being determined to live and die a British Berean.

Dr. Wellread.—Yes; but a Berean, Mr. Shrewd, was not a man who rode roughshod and helter-skelter over everybody's conclusions but his own, and that on the sole strength of what had never existed anywhere save inside his own head.

Mr. Shrewd.—As a Christian and a Churchman to boot, *vide* Art. VI, I am not bound to believe anything that cannot be proved by Scripture.

Curate and others.—Hear, hear! Then give us Scripture for your present astounding proposition.

Mr. Shrewd.—Very good: now tell me—Did he not get up next day with as much alacrity as our boys get up on Treat-morning! Did he not bustle about, and not only get together the wood for burning the youngster, but chop it up all ready before starting? When the Bible takes the trouble to tell us a little fact like that, it's our business to work it. I say that fact alone speaks volumes as to the state of mind the old Patriarch was in. I like old Paley's way of doing things. When he was argufying with that fellow Hume, "We'll try it on a simple case," quoth he. I've tried Abraham's arrangements on a simple case.

Artless.—How do we know that the Lord hadn't told him to do all that?

Mr. Shrewd.—How do we know that the Lord hadn't told him to take a hamper of ham-sandwiches? Keep to your Bible, young man. We have to do with what we are told, not what we are not told.

Vicar.—Well, give us your simple case then.

Mr. Shrewd.—A. B. resides in London. Late at night he gets a telegram telling him his only son is lying at the point of death at Manchester, and imploring him to come down by the first train the next morning. Feeling that his son may die, and want a coffin, he determines to take one with him. Accordingly, before breakfast, he steps out to the nearest undertaker's, chooses a coffin, helps pack it, and, in order that nothing may be wanting to make all complete, has a screw-driver and some screws put inside. The coffin is then put with his portmanteau atop of his cab, and off he starts for his boy's death-bed. Now, I say that a father, acting like that, could not be a particularly sensitive parent. If he were such, as a rule, his sensibilities as old Weller or young Weller said of somebody's wits, must just now have been on a visit. In like manner Abraham never could have acted as he did had his sensibilities been all on the work, as some will have it they were. I don't know much about what's called the fauna and flora of any neighbourhood except my own, but I take for granted that near Mount Moriah there must have been trees, shrubs, and thickets by the dozen, at any rate wood enough and handy enough for five hundred burnt sacrifices, let alone one,—at all

events, there was the thicket the ram was caught in. I say, then, that all this gratuitous preparing before starting does not at all agree with the idea of all that sorrow, grief, torture, pain, agony, anguish, *et cætera* which commentators have tried to stuff Abraham with like cooks stuffing a turkey.

Mr. Oldways.—Ah ! bah ! bosh !

Vicar.—Order ! order ! Mr. Oldways, please—our brother is entitled to be heard out.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, did Sarah suspect anything ? Did she smell a rat ? Can we help believing that she was a fond mother ? I believe no hen with one chicken ever set more store by her small family than did Sarah by Isaac. If her husband had been in such a state of mental worry and anguish, must there not have got loose one sigh—one groan—one grunt—one something to arrest her attention ? What ! Bishop Hall's fire blazing away within, and never a spark find its way up the chimney and out at his mouth ? Must not his face have so far flinched as to make her out with a "Wherefore lookest thou so sadly to-day ?" And unless he could have answered her with a seeming joyousness, such as no live man, bursting with agony the while, could possibly have mimicked, would not such a mother, mother-like, have been safe to say, My son shall not go down with you,—or, if he goes, I go too ?

Curate.—But we are not told that she did not remonstrate. How do we know that she did not, and

that after hearing Abraham's explanations her piety did not lead her submissively to give way? The narrative is fragmentary—every incident is not recorded.

Mr. Shrewd.—Probability is the guide of life, Mr. Zealous, not possibility. *Vide* Bishop Butler—not that I ever read him. I put it to your common sense—had Sarah done anything of the sort, would she not have had a fair right to half the praise? Why should the father in that case have all, the mother none? Are a father's feelings stronger than a mother's? Then why didn't Scripture say, "Can a father forget his sucking child?" Do you expect me to believe (without plain Scripture for it) that Inspiration would take the trouble to tell us about Abraham saddling his ass and chopping the wood, and yet never mention the poor mother's wonderful submission, if she did submit?

Dr. Wellread.—It is rather remarkable, sir, that Stackhouse—according to my notes—that Stackhouse, referring to the "Eutychii Annales," page 74, informs us that some of the Arabian writers affirm that when Sarah heard that Abraham had taken her only son into the mountain to sacrifice to God, she fell into a very great agony, which brought on a fit of sickness whereof she died. But even they make the matron's upset a thing subsequent to Abraham's departure.

Vicar.—Go on, Mr. Shrewd.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, did Isaac himself, or either of the young men, dream that anything was up out of the

common, and whether before starting or after? If not, why not? What! a man as full of agony as an egg of meat, keep it all to himself, sleeping and waking, for three whole days and three whole nights, so that neither son nor servant noticed the ghost of a sign of disquiet. What they talked about on the road I know not, but it's pretty clear that up to the identical moment when Isaac said "Where's the lamb," he was quite in the dark as to what was on the *tapis*, or what sort of an operation he was in for on the occasion. And that's one thing, by the way, that made Abraham's trial so much lighter than mine. He had not to feel for all his boy was suffering by anticipation, and anticipation, as I can bear witness, is often as bad again as the thing itself. But after all said and done, what by itself, standing all alone, would settle the question for ever and ever with me, is what Abraham said to those young fellows on arriving at the mountain, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come to you again"—

Vicar.—One moment. Is there any question about the plural form here?

Dr. Wellread.—None whatever. On the contrary, English readers are sometimes said by Hebrew scholars to lose the full force of the original. The Hebrew, by the use of the first person plural, is decidedly forcible—"and *we* will return to you."

Curate.—The Septuagint, I see, has "*καὶ προσκυνήσαντες ἀναστρέψομεν. π. υ.*"

Vicar.—Pardon the interruption, Mr. Shrewd. Will you resume?

Mr. Shrewd.—Make me believe that any father in the universe, in the state of mind so many talk about, could have found in his heart to utter such a piece of lying sham, could play with his own agony in such a gratuitous fashion! It's all very fine for Bishop Hall to talk about "holy wilfulness." I should like to have asked William Shakespeare what he thought of such a notion. Could I say to him, "William, here's a question quite in your line. Do you believe that any agonized parent could have managed to let out such a peculiar sort of a lie as that?" I am as certain as I sit here, his reply would be, "Mr. Shrewd, you are describing not a man, but a monster."

Mr. Humble.—As Abraham, sir, was in duty bound to carry out the command, he was obliged, was he not, to say something to quiet the young men and keep them from coming closer, and trying perhaps to prevent the sacrifice?

Vicar.—Yes; but I suppose Mr. Shrewd will answer that he ought not to have resorted to dissimulation, while it was also contrary to all psychological possibility that he could have done so.

Mr. Shrewd.—Besides, in patriarchal households who was master—the patriarch or his underlings? Who was it said, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him"? Had his

authority sunk so low that his simple order could not secure obedience unless backed by a lie? Besides, if he was so self-possessed as to be equal to such devices, what becomes of his mind-absorbing anguish!—a thing cannot be black and white at one and the same moment, can it? No, sir; I believe that Abraham believed his resuscitated son—if that's the word—would as certainly come back with him safe and sound as I the other day believed my son and I would return to our lodgings after he had had his dip in the sea. Well, what is the Patriarch's next move? Why he composedly deposits on Isaac's shoulders those identical faggots he had been so wonderfully ready to prepare, albeit to be used in burning him to cinders.

Superintendent.—And are we not to be thereby reverently reminded of our Blessed Master bearing His own cross?

Mr. Shrewd.—Yes, if you like—and a good thing, too, to be so reminded—but don't ask me to believe that all this was going on just for the sake of reminding you, me, or the good folk of any other generation, past or present, of anything of the kind. I say a much more sensible view is that Isaac, with filial politeness and good manners, offered to carry the things. At all events, I should say he would have been a very ill-mannered young fellow if he had not. Any way, Abraham now piles on his son's back that very wood which, according to the Agonyarians, ought to have

stirred in him pretty much the same feelings as the hangman's halter in a father accompanying a convicted son to the gallows. And so, off they trudge, Isaac shouldering the wood, Abraham bearing fire and knife, and, as far as I can see, as composedly as my wife and I last Sunday went off to church and to the Sacrament.

Major Modest.—And do you really, my dear Mr. Shrewd, mean to say that you believe any father could have gone through such an ordeal, to use your own phrase, “composedly”?

Mr. Shrewd.—I do, Major. And why shouldn't he, with such faith as his? If our unbelief is to be the bushel we measure his faith by, of course we shan't believe it. But remember, Abraham was now acting as the model Faithist, or Faithite, if there be such a word. In him faith was working in perfection—at high pressure, if I may so speak. For mercy's sake don't let us measure his faith by our own, or by any faith one comes across now-a-days. Faith, forsooth! Faith now-a-days, even when there is any at all, is a poor, one-legged, hobble-de-gee sort of principle, equal to nothing grand or striking. It's like that bird they've got at the Zoo.—that apteryx, a bird without wings—can run about in the dark, but as to soaring above the mud and the mire, can no more manage it than a snail or a toad can. Not such was our Father Abraham's faith. Why, even in my small way, I once stood on the edge of downright ruin. It was a toss-up which

way things would go. I had been walking with God more closely than usual for several weeks. I distinctly remember that I did not care a straw which way things went. Ruin had no terrors for me. I wanted to win, not lose, of course, but I cared not to win on the side the flesh would have voted for. Somehow or other faith made me feel so certain that all would come right that my feelings had nothing to upset themselves with. I've had many trials since, some of them fleabites to that business. I am sorry to say I have not faced them with half the same spiritual pluck, the same blessed don't-careishness. Somehow or other it was an exceptional exercise of faith, as, perhaps, was Abraham's here, but it proved to me that given in any case a *quantum suff.* of faith, and no trial that can be thought of will be able to make a believer's pulse beat one second the quicker.

Vicar.—Time, however, is flying. I will ask you, Mr. Shrewd, to proceed with the narrative itself.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, next we read, "And they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" And a pretty fuss has been made about this inquiry, as though God meant it for a sort of moral knife, keener than Saladin's scimitar, cutting through every morsel, fibre, and nerve of poor Abraham's heart, bringing about tortures bodily crucifixion would have

been nothing to. Now, I ask, sir, if the inquiry is not the most natural, the most matter-of-course possible after what—why the one missing link in the preparations?

Superintendent.—What did Abraham mean by his response?

Mr. Shrewd.—Exactly what he said.

Superintendent.—Yes; but what kind of lamb had he in his eye?

Mr. Shrewd.—Isaac's own self!

Superintendent.—And that thought cost him never a pang?

Mr. Shrewd.—Not the tithe of one, as I believe. Why should it?—*i.e.*, under the circumstances. Death might very well be in an instant—no long agony, no protracted apprehensions—a very different experience to that my poor girl had to pass through.

Superintendent.—But death, my dear sir, death! Every human being shrinks instinctively from dying.

Mr. Shrewd.—I'm the father of a batch of children. I hope I love them as well as most fathers. They have my permission to die, the whole lot of them, every night of their lives, provided they only come to life again next morning. What does it matter to me whether they're dead or asleep all night, if they're all right in the morning? Of course it is not easy for us to realize such feelings, because with us death's death out and out, but *if*—mind you *if*—I had the same assurance as Abraham had that death would be as soon over as a

mere nap, and perhaps sooner, what difference could it make? You don't allow for his faith.

Vicar.—Well, get on, Mr. Shrewd.

Mr. Shrewd.—Notice in passing the thoughtful, considerate way in which his father's answer spares Isaac all possible pain and apprehension until the last moment. However, now, at length, there they are, at the place God had told him of, and where the business is to be finished.

Several.—Just so; and now, Mr. Shrewd—what happened now, Mr. Shrewd? What have you to say now—what took place?

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, I'll read you what took place—
“And Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.” That's what took place.

Mr. Oldways.—That wont do, Shrewd. As boys say at marbles, “No funking.” You tell us what happened. You are not going to pull up short just at the pinch. You are bound to carry your crotchets right through.

Mr. Shrewd.—Where Inspiration has seen fit to be mum on a point, I'm not going to invent anything as to it. I leave that to the Fathers.

Vicar.—No—but what is your belief?

Mr. Shrewd.—I believe—ever have believed—ever shall believe—and can't help but believe—that the Lord now did to Isaac what he did to Adam when He took out his rib, “caused a deep sleep to fall upon him, and he slept.”

Chorus of Voices.—There now! There's for you!

Vicar.—Order, my dear friends—order! I beseech you. Forget not what class of students you profess to be.

Mr. Oldways.—Mr. Chairman, I rise to make a protest—a most emphatic protest, sir.

Mr. Shrewd.—Well, Oldways, you are not addressing the Vestry, don't split the table.

Mr. Oldways.—Brother Shrewd, hold your peace. You've had your say, let me have mine. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I protest—I say I protest—for the third time I say I protest against my friend Shrewd's goings on. Sir, we live in a rationalizing age—I say, sir, we live in a rationalizing age—and I say it to his face not behind his back, there is not a greater Rationalist in St. John's Wood than my friend Shrewd. Sir, my feelings are wounded in their most innermost sacredness! It's not a month ago, sir, that I was teaching the dear boys of my class (and not on my own authority, sir, God forbid—I'm not like Brother Shrewd, my own oracle—no, sir, Thomas Scott's authority) that Abraham, previously explained to Isaac the nature and obligations of the Divine command, the principle of his obedience, and the expectation of his father in respect of the event, and Isaac yielded submission and concurrence; for certainly he did not attempt to escape or resist, but yielded up himself voluntarily to be a sacrifice; and when he laid bound upon the altar typified our blessed Saviour, as bound by the officers of the high priest, and as nailed to the cross. And am I now, sir,

at my time of life, to eat my own words, and not my own either, but Thomas Scott's words, and all to humour and further my friend Shrewd's rationalizing propensities? Sir, my feelings are very much upset, and I must ask leave to withdraw——

Vicar.—Why withdraw, dear Mr. Oldways, it is no personal question? Pray remain.

Mr. Oldways.—Thank you, sir, I must go, any way, I've got to pick up my good lady at her brother's. Nevertheless, my feelings are very much hurt. I can't abide Rationalism, so I wish you all good-night, and may you be guided into all truth, and kept clear of Shrewd's crotchets.

[*Exit Oldways.*]

Vicar.—Our good friend is rather excitable. I must certainly acquit you, Mr. Shrewd, of rationalizing; your characteristic is rather unusually zealous adherence to the Holy Scriptures—a reverse process altogether. Your fault I should rather define as lying in excessive depreciation of authority in its longest-established interpretations. Still, we have arrived at a crisis in our criticisms, and I am strongly disinclined to proceed further with the subject this evening. While Mr. Shrewd has been speaking, I have been carefully looking through the chapter. I confess I am startled at observing for the first time how little there apparently is which sustains the view I have hitherto taken of the record. I must also admit that *primâ facie* (mind, I only say *primâ facie*) there is much in it

which will bear the turn he has given to it. My impression is, on the whole, that we cannot do better than now adjourn, in order that we may all prayerfully and carefully think over the whole matter in the interval between this and our next weekly gathering. There is, however, one point on which I should like to hear Mr. Shrewd before we part. His idea, if I understand him rightly, is, that Abraham went through the whole of this most unique ordeal not only without any pain or mental distress whatever, but with positive satisfaction and delight. Is that really your view, Mr. Shrewd?

Mr. Shrewd.—It is. I've questioned my own heart about it again and again. I have tried to put myself in Abraham's shoes, and said to Mister Me, "How would you have liked it?" I believe that as face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to the heart of man, and it makes no difference whether a given pair of mortals may have lived centuries asunder or in the same *Anno Domini*. Now, I'm perfectly persuaded that had my Heavenly Father intended me to be the Father of the Faithful instead of Abraham (you'll excuse the form of the supposition), to be the pattern faith-exerciser, that is, of our race, to be cited and quoted, and held up and brought forward as such in New Testament times; if He had intended in me shewing to all times and all tongues, how to get justified by faith, and what sort of thing faith is as concerning the trust, and the love, and the confidence, and the anti-shilly-shally-obedience

it gives rise to ; and if, nevertheless, I had disgraced myself and dishonoured God by my unbelief, and lies, and dissimulation, and misleading of others, in the way Abraham had done, and then, behold, God had come to me and said, “ Well, I’ll tempt, *i.e.*, try you once more, you shall have one more chance of recovering your prestige, and becoming meet to be the Father of that race whereof I have so often spoken to thee ”—well, all I can say is, that would have filled me brimful with joy to begin with. I cannot imagine an affectionate and dutiful child of God, such as I take Abraham at bottom to have been, being otherwise than over head and ears in delight at having such an opportunity of recovering the lost ground, and glorifying God in the way he ought to have done at first. And, then, if on the top of this I found the proposed test was to be such an easy one, by comparison, as offering up Isaac in sacrifice—not, mark it, offering up Ishmael, that had been quite a different matter ; no, nor Isaac after the birth of issue, so had that—but Isaac before the birth of issue, and, therefore, only *prô tem.*, as the saying is, for a season shorter, mayhap, than the half-year for which now-a-days a boarding-school may separate my boy and me—well, all I can say is, I should have struck up “ O be joyful ! ” then and there, or “ Glory to God in the Highest ” for letting me off so cheap, as well as kept on humming joy-tunes all the way to Moriah.

Vicar.—Well, that will do. I think I catch your

meaning. And now let us separate. At this late hour I will not detain you with any observations of mine, but as it is well to be orderly in our operations, I will ask you, Dr. Wellread, to open next time. Few are better qualified than yourself to marshal the authorities on the subject. And I am anxious that we should once for all give the fullest heed to all that godly and learned divines have concluded with respect to it. While we are not to make a God of Authority in the person of others, still less are we to deify it in our own. I should, therefore, wish to take into consideration on the next occasion (of course in due subordination to Holy Scripture itself), whatever godly men of unquestionable capacity and scholarship have thought or written on the subject. And now let us part with the wonted observances.

EVENING VI.

PRESENT.—The same parties as on the last occasion, with the exception of Mr. SHREWD and Mr. OLDWAYS.

Vicar.—(After engaging in prayer.) I am truly sorry we shall not have our brother Shrewd with us this evening. He is laid up with an attack of lumbago.

All present express regret.

Mr. Logic.—I am sorry: for he is really a good fellow, and though a little prone to kick over the traces, and ride his hobbies too hard, has in him a deal of strong good sense, with a dash of originality that gives great piquancy to much that he says.

Vicar.—Yes, and better still, he is a true man of God. I know few men whose private life better harmonizes than his with what he professes. I have the warmest respect and regard for him, but we must be content to do without him this evening. I have also a note from Mr. Oldways. He cannot come, having to go to Dorchester to see a sick brother. Dr. Wellread, I think you open this evening?

Dr. Wellread.—Well, sir, I have to avow myself the most thorough convert to the views broached by our brother Shrewd on the last occasion. I have been care-

fully collating and weighing every passage in both Old Testament and New, which bears on the subject, and I confess that I feel perfectly astonished that the current view should ever have arisen at all. I have failed to find a single peg in Scripture on which to hang it. How it contrived to spring up I cannot divine ; but the matter has opened my eyes to what I believe to be the veriest of all certainties, namely, that without knowing it, we nearly all of us are, each for each, to an extent of which no one has a more limited conception than we ourselves, the merest Traditionists. There is no precept of Scripture to which for the future I propose giving more persistent heed than Our Lord's mandate, "Search the Scriptures." Not that I read it as meaning, Consult not commentators, but rather, Swear not by them—let not their scriptures be unto you in lieu of God's Scriptures. I would, nevertheless, freely and gratefully avail myself of the many helps and aids which the learning and piety of the great body of commentators enable them to supply. And accordingly, as you indeed requested, sir, on the last occasion, I have collected together, and now adduce, the utterances of many of our leading divines, on the subject now before us. For clearness, however, I propose keeping Abraham's part of the transaction separate from that of Isaac, at any rate to begin with. Do you object?

Vicar.—Not at all.

Dr. Wellread.—I need hardly premise that this memorable 22nd of Genesis contains all that the Old

Testament reveals on our subject. As we have already disposed of all questions, save those relating to Abraham's experiences and Isaac's concurrence, I at once pass to the question of what Abraham felt throughout. And here at starting I find myself rejecting with a kind of angry amazement, the notion of Hengstenberg and Lange, that Abraham "understood the command as enjoining not a literal oblation of his son on an altar, but a mere dedication of him to a religious life." It has been said that "it takes a wise man to make a fool." Hengstenberg and Lange are wise men beyond all doubt, at any rate as a rule. Whether or no on this occasion they have succeeded in becoming for the nonce their own opposite, I stay not to debate.

Equally do I reject Bishop Warburton's far-fetched notion when treating the transaction as a mere scenical representation, implying none of the intentions in Him who commanded or him who obeyed, which belong to actions having a moral import.

To my mind, sir, this exquisitely simple narrative, redolent throughout of absolute matter of fact and nothing but matter of fact, must constrain any and every reader (who has not, as Shrewd once said, "fuddled himself with some strong drink concocted in the distillery of Messrs. Theory, System, and Co.") to believe that Abraham perfectly well understood that what he had to do was to take his very son Isaac away to Moriah, and there deal with him precisely as he had over and over again dealt with lambs, he-goats, and heifers, when offered as burnt offerings.

Let us proceed, then, to see how he acted on the occasion.

"And Abraham," says the record, "rose up early in the morning." Now, sir, I find that this early rising has again and again compelled commentators, in spite of themselves, to recognize alacrity of compliance on the part of the Patriarch. Thus Bishop Wordsworth: "The Word of God seems to have come to him by night, and he arose with *alacrity* and obeyed as soon as it was dawn." So Calvin: "This *promptitude* shows the greatness of Abraham's faith—the first dawn of morning was scarcely enough for Abraham's haste." Bishop Patrick remarks, "Some here take notice of the *readiness* of his obedience in several instances—(1) that he rose up early, (2) saddled his ass himself (though the phrase does not certainly import so much), (3) carried wood ready cleft along with him for the offering, lest he should find none there——

Superintendent.—The "Speaker's Commentary" has the following note: "The promptness and steadiness of Abraham's obedience are plainly marked in all (mark it, *all*) the simple details of this verse."

Dr. Wellread.—O yes—time indeed would fail us to adduce a tenth part of the similar testimonies, which are forthcoming, all tending to prove how Abraham's *alacrity*—mark it, *alacrity*—in obeying the mandate in question, has ever stared commentators in the face beyond the possibility of their eyes being closed against it.

And how can "alacrity" and "agony" co-exist in

the same mind, at one and the same moment, and in regard to one and the same experience? To my mind, Mr. Vicar, this appears as inconceivable as that in physics two bodies should occupy the same space at the same moment. Let us settle the point by an appeal from which there can be no appeal. Would any one dream of saying that our blessed Lord drank His cup with *alacrity*? Was it alacrity which uttered those ineffable words, "Father, if this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done!" Was that appalling bloody sweat a token of alacrity? Why, in the very non-alacrity which the Messianic agony, to my thinking, begat, I see a claim to my adoring gratitude, which, as weakening the intensity of the agony, alacrity would in some measure have abated.

Vicar.—I do not wish to interrupt you, but have not believers, faith being in adequate operation, the power of rejoicing *in* tribulation, *i.e.*, during tribulation, concurrently with it—wholly in spite of it? And, if so, are not alacrity and rejoicing somewhat akin?

Dr. Wellread.—Marvellously paradoxical, no doubt, is oftentimes the believer's experience. I grant you that he can rejoice *in* tribulation; but here we have not so much a man enabled to rejoice *in* tribulation, as a man delightedly rushing *into* tribulation—not so much a Daniel contented to be cast without a struggle into the den of lions, as a Daniel starting off with alacrity, and taking, as our friend Shrewd might perhaps say, a voluntary header into the den.

Superintendent.—Yes; if the expression may be pardoned, there is what boys would call a “cock-a-hoop” kind of alacrity about his movements—a gratuitous, not to say officious, celerity which I cannot understand, except on Shrewd’s theory, that the whole programme, for some reason or other, gratified him exceedingly.

Dr. Wellread.—At any rate, there is alacrity enough to make the agony-theory wholly untenable. I cannot believe in the joint action of alacrity and agony. The presence of the one, to my mind, demonstrates the absence of the other.

Vicar.—Had we not better get on? This particular detail has now been sufficiently discussed.

Dr. Wellread.—Very well. But if his early rising tells so strongly against the hypothesis of the Patriarch’s having obeyed in spite of profound mental distress (I stay not to discuss whether he did or did not saddle the ass with his own hands), what shall we say to his cleaving and preparing, so prematurely and composedly before starting, the identical faggots wherewith he was himself to reduce his son’s mortal framework to cinders?

Now, before more particularly weighing the bearings of this pregnant and carefully recorded circumstance, one word as to a consideration we have not a particle of scriptural warrant for ignoring. Abraham was a man subject to like passions as we are——

Mr. Logic.—Hear, hear!

Dr. Wellread.—He was a real, living, *bonâ-fide*, flesh-and-blood personage of precisely the same mould and make as the husbands and fathers of the Nineteenth Century.

Mr. Logic.—Hear, hear!

Dr. Wellread.—As a rule, God never, like Roman Catholicism, withdrew His people from active life, from Nature's morally-educative associations, never did anything calculated to de-naturalize them. Despite any purpose of providing typical instruction for our race by means of the persons, places, and procedures of the patriarchal period, the patriarchs were left to play their part amid life's ordinary realities, and feel the force of Nature's laws and dictates, as fully and freely as any in regard to whom no typical purpose was ever in operation at all. It follows that no explanation of Abraham's conduct at this juncture can be satisfactory which does not harmonize with psycholocial phenomena and experiences as presented in our own day.

Mr. Logic.—I thoroughly go with Dr. Wellread in all this. It seems to me that we should and must say of Abraham as Paley of the first emissaries of Christianity, "No solution of his conduct can be admitted which is not consistent with the principles that regulate human affairs and human conduct at present, or which makes men *then* to be a different kind of beings from what they are *now*."

Vicar.—I am not disposed to contest that view.

Dr. Wellread.—Proceeding, then, on this basis, let us try Abraham's conduct in thus making deliberate preparation (I use Bishop Wordsworth's own words) for the burning of his son's body, when he himself should have deprived it of life, as Paley dealt with Hume's celebrated theorem—that is on a simple case as nearly parallel as the peculiar circumstances will admit of our making it. And I really see no objection to the one suggested by Shrewd on the last occasion. I daresay we all remember how, in his own quaint style, he depicted a father, whose only son was dying at a distance, telegraphed for, and starting off, taking a coffin with him, with screws and screw-driver, so as to have everything ready in case the sickness should prove to be unto death.

Now conclude, as we in the judgment of charity might, that a parent acting as Shrewd suggested, might nevertheless be an affectionate man at bottom, and notwithstanding his eccentric course on the occasion, duly attached to his son, we should surely never infer that his parental sensibilities were of a very acute order, or that he was at the time inwardly contending with an anguish which nothing but dutiful submission to his Heavenly Father, prevented from breaking forth into paroxysms of lamentation. For, notice how utterly gratuitous was the prematureness of Abraham's preparation! What! had he been directed to sacrifice his son on the summit of an iceberg in the Arctic regions? Surely, surely, the land of Moriah must.

have contained wood enough for five hundred such holocausts, even though, as Targumists teach, but the fig and the palm were suitable for the purpose.

Vicar.—One moment. I should like after all to clear up a little as we go along. Can any gentleman suggest any answer to Dr. Wellread's reasonings thus far, which will harmonize Abraham's conduct with the ordinary view that he obeyed in spite of great mental distress and anguish?

Mr. Humble.—Matthew Henry says, sir, "Those that do the will of God heartily, will do it speedily: while we delay, time is lost and the heart hardened." As to the wood for the sacrifice, he says, "As if he himself had been a Gibeonite, it should seem with his own hands he cleaves the wood for the burnt offering, that that might not be to seek when the sacrifice was to be offered."

Curate.—What does he mean by "as if he had been a Gibeonite." If he is referring to the penal enactment of Joshua, by which the Gibeonites were made amongst other things, hewers of wood for the altar, the reference will not help us in our psychological perplexity. I know not but that it rather increases it.

Major Modest.—According to my notes, old Trapp, Spurgeon's favourite commentator, says, "He captivates all the powers of his soul to his Creator, goes after Him without scisitation, and so shows himself to be renewed in the spirit of his mind."

Vicar.—Yes; but the point is, did he not show himself to be free from all natural disrelish or distaste for the duty, glad of the appointed test rather than

shrinking from it. That is what our friend Shrewd contends for. His bearing, *mutatis mutandis*, certainly rather resembles what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's would have been, had they, instead of submitting to their fate with mere dutiful passiveness and resignation, proceeded with officious alacrity to bind themselves in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and cast themselves into the furnace. I confess I am beginning to believe that Abraham's conduct rather consists with his feeling that he was entering on no very trying duty. But please proceed, Dr. Wellread.

Dr. Wellread.—With characteristic abstinence, Scripture has described neither the leave-taking at starting, nor the experiences of the journey itself. But does it at all consist with what is recorded that any, "Wherefore lookest thou so sadly to-day?" left Sarah's lips? Albeit, uneasy lies the head that has a troubled heart for its *confrère*, nothing in the narrative intimates by the faintest whisper, that awake or asleep Abraham by expression of countenance, tone of voice, or any other indication, betrayed either embarrassment or anxiety. But affectionate wives and mothers, especially in the case of only sons, are peculiarly expert at detecting such symptoms, and prompt in demanding an explanation of their source. Yet no "my son shall not go down with you," escapes Sarah's lips. On the contrary, she appears to have parted with Isaac as unsuspectingly as though he had been but stepping out to meditate in the fields at eventide.

Curate.—I really begin to think it transcends all bounds of probability that unless Abraham had, as boys call it, felt “all serene,” he could so have commanded himself as not to challenge observation and inquiry from some one of the party.

Dr. Wellread.—Well, what manner of communications they had by the way we are not told but that nothing oozed out as to what was impending is manifest. For aught that appears, they all jogged along in very commonplace fashion until “that third day,” whereon Abraham “lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.” Shortly, if not immediately after this, the party appears to have halted, “And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass ; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”

Vicar.—And this particular utterance appears to me to be the crowning crux of the whole passage.

Dr. Wellread.—To me it seems the key to the whole matter. Does not Abraham seem to have spoken these words as calmly, as collectedly, as some railway traveller might announce to the porter that he would presently reclaim his luggage and return by the next train ? What right have we—what right has any mortal man to aver that this “Come again to you” was not on Abraham’s part a *bonâ-fide* announcement extending to both parties—to self and son ? We saw last time that the plural form is absolutely emphatic. Let us here mark for a moment what comes of denying

that the Patriarch honestly and firmly believed that Isaac would presently return with him whole in life and limb. Calvin—that Calvin of whom it has justly been said that as a commentator, at all events, he outshone all the master-spirits of the glorious Reformation—has actually allowed himself to suggest that in thus speaking Abraham “seems not to be free from dissimulation and falsehood.”

Mr. Gentle.—Yes; but it is part of the case of those who choose to entertain low views of Abraham’s holiness that he was given to dissimulation at trying junctures.

Dr. Wellread.—Yes, but dissimulation! falsehood! at such a time, and in the thick of such a transaction! What! faith working by lying in order to accomplish the will of God! When Euripides presents Agamemnon seeking to promote the immolation of Iphigenia by the lie of her intended nuptials with Achilles, he has the art to make the Chief actuated by something more than simple regard to the will of the goddess. In addition to this, he makes him influenced by hope of success to that expedition of which he had chief charge, on which all men’s eyes were fixed, and the triumphant issue of which would ratify his own military renown and kingly pre-eminence to the uttermost. Truly, in presence of carnal motives like these, one can comprehend the use of carnal measures. But what was there to move Abraham to use carnal weapons of any kind, nothing whatever, but simple regard to God’s will, making it either needful or profitable to immolate his offspring at all?

Mr. Logic.—Precisely. And *cui bono*, even had he been under a carnal stimulus, dissemble and lie to his servants? Is there one scintilla of proof that either their solicitude or their curiosity was in any way excited? For aught they knew, their master and his son were going to perform an act as commonplace and familiar then as family worship in a Christian household now. Why should Abraham have suspected that when he was gone they would tether the ass and steal to the spot to get a glimpse of what was going on? They were much more likely, after their journey, to stretch themselves on the grass and get a comfortable snooze.

Superintendent.—Moreover if, from the bearing of that “elder servant,” of whom we read in Chapter 24, we may infer what was the spirit in which the domestics of Abraham’s household acted, surely anything more monstrous than the supposition that a lie or subterfuge was ever necessary to ensure their obedience could scarcely be imagined.

Curate.—Besides, the very hypothesis of his having had self-possession and self-control enough to conceive and carry out such devices would surely of itself suffice to overturn the agony-theory.

Major Modest.—Has it not been contended by divines of unquestionable eminence that Abraham uttered these words prophetically?

Mr. Logic.—But suppose he did. Would not such a prophetic import be additional to, not exclusive of,—

be, to use a legal phrase, "without prejudice to" the primary matter-of-fact sense in which the Patriarch consciously used them?

Curate.—And alone consciously used them, perhaps. As when he prophesied, Caiaphas, to quote Bishop Wordsworth, "spoke with a view to political expediency, but God overruled his words to spiritual edification,"—so Abraham may have had no idea of that "further meaning" which God nevertheless designed his words should enshrine and convey.

Vicar.—Yes; but I doubt if I can allow a digression into the nature and characteristics of Prophecy. It may for present purposes suffice to remember what Bishop Butler (Anal. Part ii. chap. vii.) speaking even of prophets properly and officially such, says—"To say that the Scriptures, and the things contained in them, can have no other or further meaning than those persons thought or had who first recited or wrote them, is evidently saying that those persons were the original, proper, and sole authors of those books, that is, that they are not inspired." Whatever prophetic import, therefore, may lie hidden in the words in question, it must not for one moment regulate or affect our treatment of them as indices of Abraham's thoughts and feelings on the occasion. I must ask you to resume, Dr. Wellread.

Dr. Wellread.—Well then, sir, I affirm that any hypothesis save that of Abraham having fully believed that himself and his son would presently return

together is unendurable. He must either have meant it or not have meant it. If he meant it not, he was, *pro tem.*, a deliberate liar, or rather, perhaps, a lying maniac, for who but a maniac could have been so resolved that his cup of anguish should not slip through his fingers, or from his lips, that he will make them "lying lips" rather than they shall miss their draught. But it was all forsooth in order that he might obey God! But "lying lips" being an abomination to the Lord, could doing evil that good might come have ever chosen a more revoltingly unseemly occasion for perpetrating its ungodly goodness? Surely Hobbes himself might have shouted "Hosanna" over so striking an offering at his pet doctrine's shrine. Surely, too, had the Patriarch indeed acted in so monstrously unnatural, so gratuitously self-derisive a manner, Volney, in lieu of entitling the fourteenth chapter of his "*Recherches sur l'Histoire Ancienne*," "*Du Personnage appelé Abraham*," would have written "of the imaginary moral monster called Abraham."

Vicar.—You are waxing quite eloquent, Doctor. But I find myself going with you in the main. It does seem to have been psychologically impossible for Abraham so to have acted.

Curate.—Yes, indeed. Had he done so, he would have been something more than Coleridge was wont to call a "psychological curiosity," and had rather been a "psychological monstrosity."

Dr. Wellread.—Just so. Then without any wish

to be rhetorical, I say that evermore to common sense's simple apprehension must verse 5 be as a monument to the memory of Abraham's absolute conviction, however unrecorded its source, that in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, ere the winds of the mountain had had time to scatter the yet red-hot ashes, resuscitation would ensue, and it be given unto him to embrace and rejoice over his uninjured boy.

And what his next movement ?

Why, with the same composure as he had all along manifested, he deposits on Isaac's shoulders the fuel for his expected cremation, while he himself takes charge of the fire and knife. Off they march side by side, for aught I can discover to the contrary, as calmly as man and wife, as sire and son, might go off together on Sunday to their place of worship.

Artless.—I ask pardon, sir ; but may we not be allowed to see in Isaac a type of our blessed Lord bearing his cross.

Dr. Wellread.—By all manner of means. But is there a tittle of proof that either father or son was conscious that it was their business to provide, or that they were thus, in fact, serving to provide, any such typical instruction for future generations ? Can we doubt that both were acting every whit as humanly and naturally as though God had never designed that types or typical instruction should exist at all ? But now the record adds, "And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here

am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood : but where is the lamb for a burnt offering ? ”

Now, as we saw last time, a great deal has been made of this celebrated interrogatory, as though it had been meant to do the work of some deadly two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow, and inflicting tortures with which those against which anti-vivisectionists laudably protest would bear no comparison. Is there the shadow of a shade of intimation that anything of the sort took place ?

Mr. Humble.—Matthew Henry, sir, says, “ It was a very affecting question that Isaac asked him as they were going together. *My father*, said Isaac : it was a melting word, which one would think should strike deeper in the heart of Abraham than his knife could in the breast of Isaac. He might have said—thought, at least, ‘ Call me not thy father who am now to be thy murderer ’ ”——

Dr. Wellread.—Yes, but Matthew Henry immediately adds “ that he keeps his temper and his countenance to admiration ; ” even as just before he says, “ Without any ruffle or disorder he talks it over with Isaac as if it had been but a common sacrifice that he was going to offer.” In truth, it is almost amusing to see the way in which the foremost of our commentators are compelled, as it were, to eat the agony-theory at every step. Extracts by the score, did not time forbid, are, however, at hand using the most unmeasured language

as expressive of what Abraham is alleged to have endured on the occasion. I meet them all with the challenge, "To the law and to the testimony." Left to speak for itself, does the sacred text, so far as the consciousness of the actors is concerned, suggest one iota more than that observing the one palpable deficit, the one missing link, in the otherwise complete arrangements, Isaac naturally drew attention to it. Every requisite, save the crowning requisite the victim, being manifestly present, was not Isaac's suggestion the most natural in the world, and one which could not but have occurred to any and every body else in the same circumstances?

Vicar.—Yes; but our present question is the effect of Isaac's question on Abraham's feelings.

Dr. Wellread.—Well, keeping close to Scripture, have we in Abraham's "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering," aught but a reply redolent of serenity of spirit as well as holy tact—such tact as, *mutatis mutandis*, parents have doubtless again and again exercised since, when called to put their offspring through some presently painful ordeal, the distress attending the anticipation of which they would fain wholly spare them?

Curate.—As Luther puts it, "*Non vult filium macerare longâ cruce et tentatione.*"

Superintendent.—I am not ashamed to say that I am beginning to accept Shrewd's notion that as regarded distress on Isaac's account, Abraham had very much

the advantage of himself in the matter of his daughter and her dental trials. Certainly up to the very last moment at all events, Isaac knew not a misgiving, a shrinking, or a pang of anticipation.

Mr. Gentle.—But having now arrived at that stage of this sacred transaction when Abraham built the altar, laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac, laying him on that altar, and taking the knife to slay him, does it not become us, in common decency, to forbear any longer to liken the case to that of a young lady having her tooth out.

Dr. Wellread.—I am not so sure of that. Instantaneous death may, and I should fancy must, involve less absolute bodily suffering than dentistry oft inflicts, especially if, according to Shrewd's contention, Isaac was insensible the while.

Vicar.—Pardon me—at this late hour we cannot enter on that question. I must ask you to confine yourself to what Abraham, and he alone, personally experienced. What Isaac did or did not feel must be dealt with on a future occasion.

Dr. Wellread.—Be it so ; then I say that to Abraham the instantaneous death of his son, unpreceded as it was by any of the mental suffering which anticipation inflicts, must, under the circumstances—mark me, *under the circumstances*—have appeared a thing of trifling moment.

Mr. Gentle.—But, surely, if he was not the psychological monstrosity you so strenuously deny his having

been, his nature must have shrunk from the thought of bringing about his son's death, quite apart from the question of the other circumstances. Every human being, in my opinion, and as a law of his nature, instinctively shrinks from death.

Dr. Wellread.—But what is there in sudden or instantaneous death, apart from the permanency of the state it inaugurates, to care about? Must we not needs say of death as Young of bliss—

“A perpetuity of *death* is *death*.”

I quite agree with Shrewd that it matters nothing whether we sleep the sleep of death or the sleep of slumber, if both are equally temporary and transient. I cannot conceive that after his resuscitation, and albeit decomposition had in his case set in, Lazarus was one whit worse off than if he had merely undergone a season of suspended animation or of prolonged slumber for the same interval.

Vicar.—No. I more and more perceive that all turns on the measure of faith exercised by Abraham throughout the ordeal. If that faith really acted as concretely, dealt as definitely and decisively with the guaranteed certainties secured by the promises, as I begin to conceive it did, it really would seem that no reason whatever existed for his feeling the slightest distress. But our time is expired, and I have to visit a sick parishioner on my way home. Has any other gentleman anything to offer. Mr. Simpkin, I think you wished to say something.

Mr. Simpkin.—Well, no, sir. My views are upset altogether. Of course we must take the Bible as it really stands. We must not attempt to improve upon it. But I cannot say that Dr. Wellread's exposition makes matters as interesting and affecting as the expositions of the commentators.

Vicar.—But, as you rightly suggest, we are bound by what is written. We must abide by the Bible, whether its statements harmonize or no with our predilections. What is true, not what is interesting, demands our allegiance. But we must now prepare to separate.

On the next occasion, and before we proceed to deal with Isaac's part in the transaction, we should, I think, dwell finally and fully on the measure of the faith which Abraham now exercised. Obviously, that faith attaches to itself an interest reaching far beyond this particular transaction. It is a model faith—a faith commended to our imitation—a faith respecting which Scripture in effect says, "Go and do thou likewise." We should, therefore, carefully analyze it by all the means of analysis which the laboratory of Scripture supplies, and after "examine ourselves" whether we are the happy subjects of "like precious faith." Major Modest, it will be your turn to open on the next occasion. Will you kindly prepare to guide our deliberations by some prepared thoughts on the subject.

Major Modest.—I will, with pleasure, do my best.

EVENING VII.

PRESENT.—The same parties with the addition of
Messrs. SHREWD and OLDWAYS.

After the usual devotions, and having in the name of all present welcomed back Mr. Shrewd and Mr. Oldways, the Vicar proceeds :—

We are called this evening to deal with one of the most vital questions and verities of the Christian faith. "That Article," as Luther called it, "of a standing or falling Church," the grand doctrine of Justification by Faith. On this episode in Abraham's history which we are considering, hangs in truth and for all time the leading elucidation of this august verity. For not unto himself alone, nor those of that generation only, but unto us also he did, without doubt, then minister instruction touching this all-important matter. May the illuminating influence of the Great Teacher be indeed with us. Never let us forget the stirring language of the saintly Dean of Gloucester (Law), that "without His aid no efforts prosper, and no success ensues. His presence is the might of means. He is the only car in which Truth rides to triumph. Without Him faith cannot live, nor Christ be seen." Major Modest, I will ask you to open our subject.

Major Modest.—Well, sir, I have to express my

regret that you did not select for the purpose some one better qualified for it than myself. I assure you I have done my best to prepare a few orderly thoughts. After carefully weighing, however, what the great mass of the commentators, ancient and modern (I have had free access to them in a friend's library), have written on the subject, I cannot but incline to think that we have hitherto made much too light of Abraham's wondrous obedience, and confined ourselves too much to his faith. I mean that his obedience could hardly have been the cheap and easy thing we, on the last occasion, appeared to deem it. If that obedience really cost him nothing, as I think even you, sir, seemed to concede, it is hard to see the merit—no, I don't mean merit exactly—but where the worth or value, and yet that is scarcely the word—perhaps I ought to say, where the *acceptability* of his obedience lay. If the affair cost him never a pang—not one particle of self-sacrifice—might we not say that, unlike David in the matter of Araunah the Jebusite, he allowed himself to offer “to the Lord of that which did cost him nothing.” I hope you will allow me to quote a few passages from some of our most revered divines, in order to show that in thus dwelling on Abraham's obedience as well as his faith, I am not presumptuously setting up any novel method of my own. For example, good Bishop Hall depicts Abraham as saying to Isaac at the last moment, “If my blood would have excused thee, how many thousand times had I rather given

thee my own life than take thine. I need not tell thee that I sacrifice all my worldly joys—yea, and myself in thee ; but God must be obeyed.” ’Tis hence, I submit, clear that the venerable prelate had never dreamt that Abraham’s obedience cost his feelings naught.

Mr. Shrewd.—I beg pardon, Major, will you give me the chapter and verse for what you have just repeated ? I have been looking down the chapter, and do not find anything of that sort in it.

Major Modest.—I was not professing to quote Scripture, Mr. Shrewd. The bishop did not mean that Scripture contained his remarks in so many words.

Mr. Shrewd.—He made it out of his own head, then !

Major Modest.—Well, that is the way our brother Shrewd puts matters of this kind. All I care to have noticed is this, a godly and learned man like Bishop Hall was plainly of opinion that Abraham’s obedience was not a cheap and easy thing which cost him nothing.

Mr. Humble.—May I intrude, sir, so far as to give what Matthew Henry says ?

Major Modest.—I was just about quoting him. I doubt not this is the passage Mr. Humble means. “He goes on with a holy wilfulness (this phrase, by the way, is also used by Bishop Hall), after many a weary step and with a heavy heart, he arrives at length at the fatal place, builds an altar, the saddest that ever he built, and he had built many a one,” and so on. In like manner Calvin (not that I wholly go with that way of putting

it), speaks of God "producing a new instrument of torture by which he may more and more torment the breast of Abraham, already pierced with so many wounds," and again uses the expression, "that nothing might be wanting to the severity of Abraham's grief."

Vicar.—One moment. Are we not somewhat going over the old ground again? At any rate, we may take for granted that the bulk of the commentators treat the matter much as you now describe. Doubtless they would by no means sympathize with the view to which our meeting was inclining on the last occasion. The only remark I would make is that all such views as theirs seem open to the objection insinuated by Mr. Shrewd, the writers nowhere indicating the Scripture authority on which they rely.

Major Modest.—They reasoned, I take it, from the nature of the case.

Mr. Logic.—So did we. And in first adjusting our data, we did no violence to a single syllable of the text; whereas the commentators (notably in questioning the absolute sincerity of Abraham's intimation about their prompt joint return) have done violence to nearly the whole of it.

Major Modest.—Well, I can only repeat that if Abraham's obedience became a thing so easy, so cheap, so void of trial, I cannot see what there was in it to make it in the slightest degree, I don't say meritorious, but—well I cannot at the moment hit upon the word I want.

Mr. Oldways—Gentlemen, excuse me, I quite go with the gallant Major. You'll never make me believe that a father, with a father's feeling—and I hope we are not going to new-fangle Abraham out of them—that a father with a father's feelings in his bosom could have set about killing, and, in a manner of speaking, cremating his favourite son; and yet his feelings never flinch nor falter for a moment—no, not during a stretch of seventy-four hours. Gentlemen, if he did do it, I say it was fanaticism, not faith. As to brother Shrewd saying that he'd just as soon die every night as go to sleep, and that his whole family may die as often as it suits them, if they only come to life again next morning, a man that can talk like that, why the sooner he's in a straight-jacket the better, it my humble opinion.

Superintendent.—But are you not ignoring his faith. Abraham's faith I mean, not Mr. Shrewd's.

Mr. Oldways.—You'll pardon my presumption, but I repeat that I should call such faith fanaticism. A faith that could send the feelings to the right about, as *per* your supposition, must be fanaticism, in my humble judgment.

Mr. Logic.—Brother Oldways, may you not, without knowing it, be acting like that torrid-zone potentate, who was for hanging his ambassador for lying, because on his return from a cold country, where he had seen no end of ice, he told his master he had seen water become as hard as a marble slab. Never having

exercised such faith yourself, may you not be finding it difficult to form a conception of it?

Vicar.—'Tis clear to me that we are again drifting to leeward of the true question for this evening's consideration, namely, the instrument of Abraham's justification—was it his obedience or his faith? Grant, if you please, that his obedience did involve all that mental distress contended for by many—but of which I must honestly say I see no trace in Scripture—is it any the less true that he had nothing whereof to boast before God? Was he not, after all, justified by faith, not works—by the principle itself, not the obedience in which it inevitably resulted?

Major Modest.—My dear sir, I admit all that. At the same time, it does seem as if such a cheap obedience as Mr. Shrewd contends for had in it very little that could please the Lord.

Mr. Oldways.—Hear, hear! Gentlemen, I consider that we ought all to stand transfixed, in a manner of speaking, with awe and admiration, and wonder and approbation, at the Patriarch's wonderful obedience in such trying circumstances.

Vicar.—But, dear Mr. Oldways, should you not make some reference to the glory due to Him in whom, after all, Abraham lived and moved and had his being, and from whose gift he gained the faith which capacitated him to obey?

Mr. Oldways.—Oh, of course—as in duty bound, I say, as in duty bound, let us give the Lord the honour

due unto His Name ; but I cannot bring myself to shunt or shelve Abraham's wonderfully holy obedience just to suit my friend Shrewd.

Vicar.—Well, we must really get on. Major Modest, have you anything further to add ?

Major Modest.—No, sir, I have carried matters as far as I have the power to do.

Vicar.—Then, Dr. Wellread, will you kindly take up the matter where you left it last time ?

Dr. Wellread.—Well, sir, to my mind the question whether Abraham had or had not this great fight with his feelings, whereof some speak, has an important bearing on the question of his justification, if only because of the stress some of our friends have laid on it. Had he no such fight than that he was justified by faith alone will, I imagine, be much clearer to some of us than is otherwise likely ? What, then, says the New Testament, whose testimony we did not enter on last time ?

In Romans iv. we find nothing bearing directly on the point one way or the other, for there the stress is rather laid on the earlier exercises of faith connected with Isaac's miraculous birth.

Take, then, Hebrews xi., and where is the slightest reference to any reluctance or hesitation, or any such state of mind as attends that form of concurrence whose motto is, "Not my will, but thine be done" ? Rather is there a statement of ready submission incited by the distinct persuasion that the sacrifice demanded

was but of a temporary or nominal character. "By faith, Abraham," says the Apostle, "offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (a parenthesis, the only force of which lay in the guaranty which the very fact involved that Isaac, being as yet childless, must needs come to life again) "accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Could any language under the sun make more manifest what was Abraham's actuating conviction throughout?

In St. James, where the act or work of offering is in a sense, and a manner, and for a special purpose, made, for the nonce, more prominent than the faith which produced it, such work is nevertheless mentioned not as a demonstration of self-sacrifice, but as a proof of faith.

So that whence first came the notion that Abraham passed through an ordeal of great mental suffering, and had to war a great warfare with his feelings and all the rest of it, for the life of me, dear Mr. Vicar, I cannot divine. And I cannot help suspecting that all this harping on the Patriarch's obedience betrays a *leetle* disinclination or inability to concur in that view of justification which puts, *pro tem.*, good works entirely at arm's length, allowing them no more share in the process than can be ceded to our positive culpabilities.

Mr. Logic.—Heyday! Wellread, you are verily and indeed a Solifidian over head and ears.

Dr. Wellread.—No doubt, up to the point to which

Scripture itself is Solifidian, namely, that faith alone without works fully and finally justifies.

Mr. Logic.—But justifying faith always works by love, and love being expressly defined to be law-fulfilling, faith may be said to work by law-fulfilling, which is only another word for good-work-performing.

Vicar.—Yes ; but it thus works *after* justifying and not *before*, and not so as to make the love instead of itself the justifier. Faith justifies (I mean, of course, instrumentally), not by its results, but its own native *vis*. One might almost say that it justifies in its sap—not in its fruit-stage. The late Bishop Wilberforce, writing to one of his brothers, before the perversion of the latter to the Romish Church, spoke of the fruit in which true faith necessarily issues as a *necessary accident*. I see no objection to the phrase. On the contrary, I think it both a concise and a comprehensive definition. On the one hand it expresses that *inevitableness* which pertains to faith's fruitfulness wherever faith is genuine ; on the other, that fruitfulness's absolute *non-inherence* (save as a tendency) in faith's essence viewed simply in its justifying stage. Dr. Wellread has said that to the same extent as Holy Scripture he is a Solifidian. So am I. Respecting faith, regarded as a justifier, I am utterly such. But, regarded in the entirety of her operations, I am as absolutely non-Solifidian. Faith is not a principle having but one office ; faith is a sanctifier as well as justifier. A man enters not heaven in virtue of

justification alone. Without holiness (a thing with which justification has nothing to do except to precede and produce it) no man shall see the Lord. As far as title is concerned his justification does all; but *title*, whether we will or no, must combine with *meetness*, and this latter faith secures by sanctifying her *protégé* after she has justified him. In the moment that faith both commences and consummates justification, she, if there be such a word, *incepts* sanctification, but justification being already consummated, how can the sanctification affect it one way or the other.

Major Modest.—St. James says distinctly, “By works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

Vicar.—Pardon me, Major, St. James does not say so—that is, in the way that you are saying it. You are making it as absolute and self-complete a proposition as St. Paul’s statement, “We are justified by faith without the works of the law.” St. James’s declaration is interwoven with, and results from, a train of reasoning which self-evidently remits it to the same category as St. Paul’s other statement, “though I have *all* faith and *no* charity, I am nothing,” by which he surely never meant flatly to contradict himself.

Mr. Humble.—I don’t know how it is, sir, but I always get a little muddled over this matter. It seems after all that good works or sanctification have as much to do with salvation as faith or justification.

Mr. Logic.—But no one says they have not.

Artless.—Salvation looks to me, sir, very like

wedlock. It takes two to make wedlock, a man and a woman, but the man ain't the woman, and the woman ain't the man. Each is a complete article without the other. But it's only when they come together that you've got wedlock, and so it's only when Faith and Works—Justification and Sanctification—come together that you've got salvation.

Vicar.—Yes; but like all illustrations of the kind the parallelism is but partial, not to say defective. The two are more like sire and son than husband and wife—the one completely existing before the other comes into being at all; nay, the one originating the other rather than co-existing with it, at any rate, in the first instance.

Mr. Shrewd.—A man, methinks, must be a dunder-head twice-told who could trace his justification in whole or in part to his doings, *alias* his sanctification. Timothy Thompson turns traitor, is caught, tried, and cast for death. When his head's on the block, his king pardons him. Timothy Thompson highly appreciates the proceeding, and turns anti-traitor, fighting away for his king like a treble X hero—performs, in fact, so many glorious feats that he finishes up with a coronet. Were Timothy Thompson in his private ledger to put his pardon as well as his coronet to the credit of his good works' account, his wits, methinks, must have been off duty the while, and I'm pretty sure no auditor would pass the balance sheet.

Vicar.—But we have in some way taken the matter

out of Dr. Wellread's hands. Dr. Wellread, will you kindly resume, and conclude anything you have to say with regard to Abraham's case.

Dr. Wellread.—Well, sir, then for the various reasons I have sought to adduce, I cannot resist the conviction that while on Abraham's faith the strain was tremendous, upon his feelings there was no strain at all. In other words, his faith being equal to the strain, his feelings escaped scot-free. I may illustrate my meaning by an operation in physics. We all know that if an iron anvil, of sufficient thickness, be laid across a prostrate man, blows with a sledge-hammer may be struck with all our might on that anvil, and the man lie unharmed beneath. So Abraham had the shield of faith across his breast, and when the sledge-hammer of test—and terrible test too, no doubt—struck at him, the shield remaining whole, he came off scatheless.

Ourate.—You mean that his trial was *nil*, so long as his faith failed not. But his faith in what? In God's general lovingkindness and disposition to make all things work together for his good?

Dr. Wellread.—O dear no! In God's specific promise concerning Isaac. In that definite groove his faith ran on this occasion. That promise, under the circumstances, and quite apart from anything else God may or may not have said to him, amounted, Isaac being at the time childless, to a distinct guaranty that if he, Abraham, would for the moment take Isaac's life, and

thus prove his absolute confidence in God and God's words, the lad should come to life again; that death, in fine, should, in his case, be rendered innocuous; become, in fact, no death at all. But it must have taken a tremendous measure of child-like faith to make a father equal to such an experiment. I incline to think that never before, and never since, has the faith of this occasion been exceeded, even if it has been equalled.

Curate.—Truly I begin to feel that, granted the faith, the trial was naught. And this opens up a wide question, whether or no in every case faith ought not to be a present emancipator from all kinds and degrees of fright or fear, discomfort or disquiet. If you notice, our Lord's rebukes of "little faith" often occur under circumstances making them on any other hypothesis unintelligible. Take the affair on Gennesaret, for example. Albeit the ship was evidently *in extremis*, the whole party about to go to the bottom, says our Lord, on waking, "Why are ye fearful," not "Why are ye *so* fearful."

Superintendent.—In Mark it is "*so* fearful."

Curate.—Yes, but that was afterwards. Our Lord appears to have repeated the reproof after he had stilled the tempest. But there is no *οὐρα* in his first rebuke.

Artless.—I have been listening very attentive, sir, to all that has been said. Do you know, sir, since I took to believing the Bible I have often found that when I've come to be of a sudden in some great fix—

which in old days would have done for me then and there, and even now for a bit has seemed to crush me like—if I've got well hold of some text that has seemed very much to the point, it has set me up like in a twinkle, and made me feel a sort of a comfortable don't-care sort of feeling what might happen to me here-away in this life. And I do believe, sir, that where there's a goodish bit of faith at work the feelings always get off easy. I can quite understand, sir, that if holy Patriarch Abraham had tight hold of God's promise that in Isaac, and nobody else, his seed should be called, that seeing he was to offer up Isaac before the young man had got married and had a child—I say, sir, I can quite understand his going through the whole thing very calm and very comfortable like.

Superintendent.—Yes; and may I add that in my small way I have from time to time experienced like emancipation of my feelings ever since I savingly embraced the truth, and I was an adult when I first did so. Again and again have I since then been placed in circumstances in which I knew from experiences then past that my previous self would have 'broken down altogether. Yet solely from taking Bible-ground, *i.e.*, grasping one or more of what we call the Promises, on the face of them applicable to my case, I have not only held out and held on, but become so utterly free from anxiety or choice touching the issue as to be a perfect puzzle to my own self. I strongly suspect that Abraham's

experience on this occasion was something of the same kind, only vastly superior in degree.

Vicar.—I by no means question what has now been said. But it seems to bear on a different function or effect of faith from that we are here to discuss this evening, and that is Faith's *justifying* force or energy. Has any other gentleman anything to offer on this head?

Mr. Gentle.—I desire, sir, to go with all that has been said as to our being justified by faith. Nor have I any wish to treat faith as being in any sense or shape meritorious. It nevertheless remains true that had Abraham not obeyed, he would not, as a matter of fact, have been justified at all on the occasion. I know the answer will be that had he not obeyed it would have been plain that unbelief not Faith governed him, and hence the miscarriage would have been traceable to the absence of Faith, not the absence of Obedience. But it appears to me, sir, that we must guard against being nervously apprehensive of using the term "justified" in connexion with obedience, seeing not only what the inspired apostle St. James has written, but how St. Paul uses the word in such passages (this example will suffice) as, "not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."

Mr. Logic.—I quite understand what Mr. Gentle feels and expresses. After a good deal of self-examination, however, on this subject, I have come

to the conclusion that there is in our nature a deep-rooted preference for self-justification. Without knowing it, perhaps, we cannot but secretly yearn to be self-justified if not wholly at least in part. To use a homely phrase, "we must have a finger in the pie," it may be our little finger only, but yet *a* finger. I firmly believe that this proclivity is before all others that which the Gospel is most bent on mortifying, and has the greatest difficulty in mortifying.

Mr. Shrewd.—And that same proclivity, by the way, I believe to be the key and clue to the whole system of Ritualism, as well as Popery-proper. This time last year, oddly enough, we had in different quarters of our family cases of scarlet-fever in the flesh. Now we have divers cases of scarlet-fever in the spirit, caught from tampering second-hand, *viâ* Ritualism I mean, with the sentiments, habits, and doings of that scarlet bad character who hails from the Seven Hills. Now I've studied these spiritual fever-patients a good deal, and wherever there's anything like genuine earnestness,—for all Ritualists are not really earnest (Ritualism, if not hydra-headed, is hydra-hearted, *i.e.*, its motives are many)—but where there is genuine earnestness, there also is no end of going in for so-called self-sacrifice and self-denial. Such a getting up stairs in the way of getting up opportunities for being self-sacrificial and self-martyred, I never before came across. Why even in reference to the purest blessings offered us by our Heavenly Father,

and which He plainly wishes us to enjoy abundantly when sanctified by His Word and prayer, Ritualism seems to reply (with a "devoutness" perfectly original, *i.e.*, as far as regards being any piracy from Holy Scripture), "No, thank you, I prefer doing a little self-sacrifice instead"——

Vicar.—But surely, Mr. Shrewd, the spirit of self-sacrifice, when operating legitimately, is neither to be lightly esteemed, nor lightly spoken of.

Mr. Shrewd.—Ah! I don't believe in self-sacrifice, I believe in love. Where faith works by love I believe all things are counted loss that we may gratify and glorify Him we do love, by doing His will from the heart. Our will becomes so conformable to His will, that self requires no crossing. There will be little room left, methinks, for what folks calls self-sacrifices. Self-sacrificers are too fond of buttering-up and soft-sawdering one another; just as the Ritualists in my neighbourhood are buttering-up a niece of mine they have managed to get hold of. Of course, self-senior, *alias* the old Adam, must, on the love-system, go to the wall *in toto*. He and his ways must be made a perpetual sacrifice of. But love will move self-junior, *alias* the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, to get the upper hand of him, with more and more fulness the older he gets. But this is a very different thing from officiously, fussily, gratuitously, everlastingly, concocting and fabricating ways of our own for getting up so-

called self-sacrifices and self-denials (scrubbing chancel floors, and the like), which, as often as not, means cashiering less showy, less public, and less toothsome duties of God's appointment in favour of more showy, more fussy, and more tasty duties of our own or our party's devising. Such doings seem to me to be self-sacrifices only in so far as they are *self*-got-up, *self*-concocted, *self*-endorsed. There's that young Ritualistic niece of my own. As to home duties, including the claims of an invalid mother, she has long since pitched them overboard neck and crop. But as to gadding off to early services,—everlasting attendance at Matins and Evensong—decorating sham-altars—worrying out of their lives the poor she visits to go and confess—running in and out like a dog at a fair, wherever there's some young Ritualistic priestling to fandangle after,—why, as to all those forms of self-sacrifice, or self-consecration, for such she deems them, and such her sect pronounces them, she's the most “devoted” being under the sun. I should think St. Cecilia herself must have been a fool to her. But you'll never make me believe that that's the kind of thing our Divine Master wanted to bring about when He said “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Dr. Wellread. — Without wholly endorsing our friend's way of putting matters, I cannot but fear, from what I myself observe, that a great deal of injurious misapprehension prevails among those to whom he refers as to the value in the Divine sight of a ceaseless

round of ceremonial services. I strongly suspect that, without allowing it, and, in fact, without knowing it, the adherents of a certain system are engaged in a self-justifying process, and are, in fact, going about to establish their own righteousness.

Superintendent.—I happened the other day to look in by sheer chance, at a Ritualistic service. I was astounded. What our Lord said to that poor creature from Sychar about God being a Spirit, to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, came to my mind with unusual force.

Mr. Logic.—Such doings are indeed marvels, especially when we recall that even under the old dispensation, which, by Divine appointment, was one of costly and cumbrous ceremonial, the Divine language in effect seems, nevertheless, to have been, “Who hath required this at your hands—bring no more such vain oblations—give me thine heart”——

Vicar.—But may I ask what all this has to do with the question more immediately before us, namely, What was after all the instrument of Abraham’s justification on this occasion—was it his faith or his obedience, or both in combination? Does any other gentleman wish to address himself to that point in particular?

After a pause the Vicar proceeds:—

Then we must begin to think of separating. Before, however, doing so, and although we shall have sat somewhat longer than usual this evening, I must ask

you to bear with a few words from myself, touching the important question which has mainly occupied us on this occasion.

As regards Abraham's personal experiences and sensations, I am in the result unable to doubt that the unique simplicity, and exceptional integrity of his faith, caused his trial, under the circumstances, to be throughout easy, if not gladsome. Without attempting to dogmatize where the data are so limited and fragmentary, I cannot but feel that, at any rate, it perfectly consists with every syllable of the narrative, as well as with all the moral probabilities, whether psychologically or theologically considered, that in its bearing on the Patriarch himself, the object of this trial (and we must not forget that this is the only occasion on which Inspiration has written "God did tempt, or try, Abraham") was to rehabilitate him as a typical or model believer, the Father of the Faithful, the great first-root descent from whom was to become his race's proudest boast; and this, after the temporary forfeiture of his standing as such by his later act of unbelief, distrust, and impropriety. I can moreover readily imagine that such a one as he would have pined after such a restoration, as well as often prayed for it; while his own contrite consciousness of the character and consequences of his culpability, would prepare him for an ordeal of some severity, and much trouble in the flesh. If so, then when on the contrary the appointed test was found to be of such a nominal kind,

as the guaranteed future of Isaac, under the circumstances, necessarily made it to be—(for I entirely agree with those who deem that had Isaac died by his father's hand, his death would have been virtually no death at all. We may gather this from our Lord's own remark in the case of Lazarus, "This sickness is not unto death,"—but it was unto death, and burial, and decomposition to boot, showing that only when death assumes a chronic form, is it really death)—I repeat that when, after all, the test proved to be of so light and nominal a kind, except in its pressure on his faith, one can easily conceive his setting about the matter with an alacrity proportioned to the delight of the recoil from gloomier anticipations. This alacrity would, no doubt, as Mr. Shrewd suggested, arise in some degree from self-gratulation; but, as it has been justly remarked to-night, Abraham was a man subject to like passions as ourselves, and not so transcendently non-mundane a being as to be insensible to the pleasantness when not wrongly secured of escape from suffering. I accept, in fine, Dr. Wellread's conclusion—the strain on his faith was tremendous, but his faith proving equal to it, the strain on his feelings became virtually *nil*. The probability thus arising from all I have just said, appears to me to be greatly strengthened by the fact that, after all, it was in faith rather than obedience, through unbelief and distrust, rather than through rebellion or positive immorality, that he had broken down. It thus became antecedently probable that to

faith rather than to obedience, would the coming test apply itself. Under all the circumstances a child should perhaps be able to see that were Abraham justified at all, it must have been by the faith, not the obedience, and the faith alone, not the faith *plus* the obedience; the latter, under the circumstances, having no more to commend it than would the obedience, so to call it, of a child who, when invited by its parent to come and take possession of something very much to its liking, accepts with alacrity the invitation and comes.

Mr. Gentle.—And yet, dear sir, how marked the emphasis by the Divine Majesty itself placed upon the obedience! “By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast *done* this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast *obeyed* my voice.”

Vicar.—But with these passages was not the great apostolic expounder of this thrice-sacred doctrine, speaking as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, quite familiar when he affirmed, “Abraham *believed* God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness?” Erred Paul, then, in placing for his purpose the stress on the *principle*, not on its *proof*? It surely is not hard to

discern why in Genesis the obedience as the visible necessary outcome, not the faith, as the invisible energy and source was rather indicated. The terrible tendency which man has, notwithstanding, from that hour to this, ever shown to confound mere brain-belief in doctrines with heart-belief in the persons and facts which those doctrines concern (often abusing unto actual licentiousness what should minister to holiness) may well explain why that which the one form of belief does not and the other does produce, to wit, conduct to match, should be put forward rather than the cause itself, as demonstratively determining the doer's resulting portion.

Well, so much for the trial as it bore on Abraham's own personality.

But it is to my mind plain that the trial had a twofold object; the second being that a practical elucidation or illustration of how Faith works when justifying might be secured for the use and edification of the race at large. So Matthew Henry, when summarizing the Pauline argument in Romans iv, says, "All that are saved are justified in the same way as Abraham was." Says Beza, "From this single example of Abraham, as deservedly selected from among all the Fathers, the Apostle intended to draw a conclusion which would necessarily take in all believers. And that he might do this fairly, he intimates at the very entrance of the question that he did not propose Abraham merely as one of the number of believers, but as the Father of the Church,

that he might properly reason from the father to his children." We, however, scarcely need this uninspired testimony, because in Romans iv, St. Paul himself expressly declares that what was written concerning the imputation of Abraham's faith for righteousness, was not written "for his sake alone, but for ours also," to whom a like imputation will be extended on like terms.

I am quite aware that, as Dr. Vaughan says in his "Notes on Romans," Paul's declaration, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness," was said, "not of his leaving his country, nor of his offering up his son, but of his believing God's promise that his seed should be as the stars, when as yet in his old age he had no son." But though then and thus spoken, is it not perfectly clear from Hebrew xi, that the statement equally covers, is equally applicable to the other two examples in question; one of which—and that, indeed, the one immediately before us—St. James prefers to adduce when himself discussing the mode of Abraham's justification. All the three exercises or examples of faith are placed on a common footing, in that common category which Hebrews xi presents. "By faith," says the Apostle, "Abraham went out"—"by faith he sojourned in the land of promise"—"by faith, when tried, he offered up Isaac." If, then, by faith alike were one and all the three achieved, were it not akin to puerility to suppose that in one alone, but not in the other two, that faith was imputed for righteousness? Surely, even in matters of

this kind, like causes produce like effects. I venture, indeed, to conceive that St. Paul, like St. James, would probably have preferred arguing from the case of the offering of Isaac (of which alone he was able to say "when he was tried"), but that the necessities of his argument, in relation to those not of the circumcision, required that the example selected should be anterior to the institution of that rite. I take it, therefore, that we cannot but understand Inspiration as holding in reference to the offering of Isaac, as well as of his believing the promise that his seed should be as the stars, that "Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

Viewed, then, under this aspect, *i.e.*, as a designed illustration of Faith's *modus operandi* in justifying, it seems to me much more than merely probable that the test would be so adjusted as to make the faith all, and the obedience naught (except as evidencing the faith), and this mainly in order to anticipate and meet that stubborn, universal, tendency of the human heart to seek justification by its own acts, and to go about to establish its own righteousness, not submitting to the righteousness of God to which we have already referred. For if the smallness of the Patriarch's trial, and *ergo* the immeritoriousness of his obedience, was inversely as the greatness of his faith, a child can see what a death-blow is thus given to the notion that our resulting obedience (albeit as absolute a *sine quâ non* as faith itself, though for other reasons) has, or ever

can have, any connexion whatever with the causes and grounds of our justification.

And thus would also be illustrated another important property of faith—to wit, that according to its measure it is a victory which overcometh the world and its influences, not only as regards temptation, but as regards suffering also; in other words, faith to a great extent, renders even difficult and flesh-painful obedience, easy and delightful.

I take it, then, that, as on former occasions so on this, the instrument of Abraham's justification was his faith, and nothing but his faith. So to speak, Faith could of that Justification say, as Coriolanus concerning the capture of Corioli, "Alone I did it."

And what was it that the Patriarch did believe? Answer—the record which God had given him concerning his son, *i.e.*, his own son Isaac. Is not this precisely what we have to do in regard to the record which God has given us concerning His own Son, Jesus? The record concerning Isaac was that from him should proceed the countless posterity guaranteed by the Promise. The record concerning our Lord is that He is the Propitiation for our sins, as well as the Lord our Righteousness, also the Lord our Example, and so following. Let our faith in the record which concerns us be commensurate with Abraham's in the record which concerned him, and precisely the same pair of results will follow—(1) our faith—its efficiency, of course, being not intrinsic or self-contained, but

derived from that which it appropriates—will equally be counted to us for righteousness, (2) our obedience will be co-extensive with his, that is to say, will cover the entire area which the terms of the record may open up as one for obedience to occupy.

Let me here, however, incidentally mention that I hold not Abraham *as a sinner* to have been justified by his present, or any like exercise, of faith. His justification in that direction, like our own *quâ* sinners, flowed from faith in that august record which concerned Messiah. This, as it seems to me, is conclusively implied in our Lord's words, "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day."

One word more.

As already intimated, the peerless simplicity of Abraham's faith rendered his present path and programme of obedience not only painless but pleasant. Herein may his experience and ours likewise correspond, according to the measure of our own faith. I agree that as working by Love, faith if it deliver not wholly from Sorrow's coils, at all events delivers from Sorrow's fangs——

Mr. Shrewd.—Like Livingstone when the lion got hold of him.

Vicar.—Well, I was not thinking of him. But perfect love would, I imagine, cast out mental pain, almost as fully as it casts out fear. It will also, except in the sense of mortifying fleshly proclivities not yet wholly extinct, put an end to all undue notions and

fancies about self-denial and self-sacrifice. For the same mind being in us as was also in our Lord Jesus, whatever tends or pertains to holiness and the glory of God, will command our warmest regard and most ardent preference. What but for our love would be self-sacrifice, becomes, in fact, self-seeking made holy. One leading defect in that system to which our brother Shrewd has referred, in terms perhaps a trifle harsh, no doubt is that it too much supplants love by duty, or rather unwittingly substitutes "duties" (not infrequently of an ascetic type) and ceremonialism for love, and its spontaneous and ready, as well as universal, law-fulfilling. One ex-colonial Bishop of that creed, using the word "worship" in its Ritualistic sense, has not hesitated to declare that the "essence of Christianity is worship." Another clergyman of the same School has, concerning the same worship, declared that "it is the *raison d'être* of the Church's existence." How distinctly this contradicts our Lord's own definition of the same *raison d'être*, as expressed in the Church's august commission recorded in St. Matthew's closing verses, or St. Paul's estimate of his functions, as not sent even to administer sacraments so much as to preach the Gospel, I need not stay to point out. But ever thus in proportion as we allow the Church and its worship-ritual to usurp in our thoughts and affections the place of Christ and His love-ritual, will expand the tendency to exalt so-called "worship," and to multiply its outward acts and observances, in forget-

fulness, too often, that though we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and our very bodies to be burned, all goes for nothing if love be lacking, the which love, moreover, must be love to the Lord Himself, not mere love of ordinances, which—nor can we shut our eyes to the fact—are too often loved for their own sakes. The question we must answer must be—"Lovest thou Me?"—not lovest thou a certain ritual carried on in my name, and having attractions of its own by no means deficient in flesh-pleasing and self-satisfying charms and characteristics.

No; without love, depend upon it, all is nothing, and worse than nothing. With love all is acceptable and accepted, albeit as devoid of what man deems merit as marble of animal life.

Beware, then, I beseech you of overmuch ceremonialism—of excessive addictedness to outward rites and ordinances. Rather, from the first to the last moment of each day, be doing all to the glory of God, not only as regards the sanctuary, but all as zealously as regards life's more obscure and less exciting home and social duties, sanctuary duties falling in line with the rest, but only according to their just proportion.

But, oh! on the other hand, equally beware of holding the august truth of justification by faith alone in unrighteousness, or, rather let me say, non-righteousness. I do verily believe that the absence in the lives of so many, who are yet great sticklers for the doctrine itself, of those fruits of righteousness which are by

Jesus Christ to the glory of God, has done more than all beside to bring the doctrine into detestation and contempt. Thus in Tractarianism's earlier days, the unhappy though gifted author of "The Ideal of a Christian Church," pronounced it "worse than Atheism." And how many beside him have since denounced it as the most immoral doctrine ever concocted. Never forget that the faith which justifies without works is the most work-prolific influence in the universe. Its fecundity in this direction almost baffles computation. Justifying faith consists not, and never did consist, in mere opinion, mere intellectual assent to religious propositions, mere mental recognition of religious truth. 'Tis no affair of creed, mind, or intellect alone. A man may believe in the *fact* of the Incarnation, in the *fact* of the Atonement, in the *fact* of its efficiency, in the *fact* of the Resurrection, but he may believe all this in the same way as he believes in the conquest of Mexico by Cortes, or the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. But such a belief has no more in it of what Scripture means by faith than has yonder bust of dear Mr. Fisk, of Mr. Fisk's piety or pulpit power. It is no more faith itself than the handle alone or blade alone is a knife. Heart and head must unite in producing faith. Their double parentage faith needs as much as the child its double parentage of father and mother. There must be a contemporaneous concurrence of the will, choosing, accepting, adopting, appropriating, utilizing that to which the

understanding assents, and this concurrence it is which marks faith's justifying stage. Hence, justification is as prompt a process, as instantaneous an achievement, as the cure which resulted from the one quick glance of the bitten victim at the brazen serpent in the wilderness. Instantly after, however, comes Love into being and operation, Faith thus entering without the loss of a moment on her sanctifying stage.

But I have already detained you too long. Let me in conclusion say that having now dealt with the most important question arising out of our present inquiry, we might here well close our discussions on it. I feel, however, that we must give one more evening, in order to deal with Isaac's own part in the transaction. It is here, if Mr. Shrewd's notion is to be entertained, that we shall most decidedly diverge from all teaching on the subject, ancient and modern; for I do not myself recall a single instance in which the active and pious concurrence of Isaac has been questioned. It will be well, then, fully to ventilate this question on the next occasion, when probably Mr. Shrewd will see his way to adopting what has been the view of all Christian divines from the earliest days. Such a consensus of view it would ill become any of us lightly to disregard. Mr. Gentle, I will ask you to open the subject next time. Let us now close with the doxology.

EVENING VIII.

Scene as before. Present: the same parties, omitting Mr. OLDWAYS. Prayer offered as usual.

Vicar.—Mr. Gentle, I believe you open this evening. Our subject is Isaac's part in the memorable transaction on Moriah.

Mr. Gentle.—Well, sir, I have been at much pains to search through and through all the commentators in my possession, as well as many others in the hands of friends. I have wholly failed to find a single instance of any writer, whether of greater or less eminence, who has doubted the piously conscious concurrence of Isaac at the last moment in the proposed sacrifice of himself. I admit there is equally wanting any reference to express scriptural grounds for this singularly unanimous conclusion, but of its unanimity there cannot be a moment's question. And how should this unanimity affect ourselves? Now, sir, differ as I may and do in many points of moment from the late Bishop Wilberforce, I do most heartily concur in his view of the effect which a uniform interpretation from the earliest ages should have on present belief. With your permission, I will read what the gifted prelate

wrote in 1842, in a letter which will be found at page 214 of the first volume of his life by Canon Ashwell:—
“The Bible being to *each one* of us *the* rule of faith; and being, as I believe, the very living Word of God, it will speak straight to the heart of each one who uses faithfully whatever aids God has given him to understand it; these aids are, for the first, the teaching of the Holy Spirit to be obtained by earnest prayer; then the singleness of eye which belongs to sincerity in God’s sight; and then, beyond these, all the external aids God gives each man, *i.e.* pious parents and pious friends to the child; and, to all, the guides and directors whom His providence has furnished. If a man, then, refuses to use these, he does refuse to study the Bible in God’s way; and it is not because these are *plainer* than the Bible that therefore he must go to them to understand the Bible (a way in which the Tract people, I think, often speak), but that these are helps God has provided: glasses for weak eyes; which they will make use of if they are sincere, and which God will bless. Now of all these assistances of a material kind and external, and not inward and spiritual, there can be none so great as the uniform and consenting judgment of all God’s saints upon the meaning of God’s Word; and wherever there is such a judgment I do not see how any single man *can* set his own inference from God’s Word against theirs. For instance,” continues the bishop, “the Socinian understands certain texts in his way. We tell him he is heretical in doing so; he

replies that we are. We say the plain meaning of the passage is against him : he retorts the charge on us. He asserts that he has sought for light and teaching as we have. Now is it *not* a valid argument against this man to say—All God's saints have understood the passage as we do. The Creeds show that in the earliest times it was so understood and you therefore are setting your private interpretation against the uniform interpretation of all ages ; and who is likely to be led right, you in your private interpretation, or they in their universal one ? ” Thus, adds the bishop, “ While the Bible is the rule of faith ; whilst every honest man who prays for God's Spirit will be led into essential truth ; whilst this seems to me the important point to bring continually out : still, on the other hand, I think it most important to remember that the meaning of the Scripture is in each place *one* ; that no other meaning is *the* meaning ; and that there is the highest conceivable improbability that a meaning which suggests itself to one or two persons, be they Fathers or men of the Nineteenth Century, is the *right* meaning if it differs from the meaning which God's saints from the beginning have been led to attach to it. This, I think, is what the Article means by calling the Church the keeper and witness of Holy Scripture.”

Now, sir, seeing that the sole passage of Scripture which bears on our subject, “ And Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood,”

settles not the question in express terms one way or the other, and, to say the least, is quite as consistent with the traditional conclusion as with that favoured by Mr. Shrewd, I, for one, feel bound to let Bishop Wilberforce's test turn the scale. I hold, therefore, that there is the highest conceivable probability that the solution suggested by our brother Shrewd cannot be the right one, differing as it does from the solution which God's saints from the beginning have been led to adopt. I will add no more.

Vicar.—Mr. Shrewd, do you wish to say anything?

Mr. Shrewd.—No, sir; I do not wish to be always on the talk. All present know my notion well enough, namely, that a deep sleep from the Lord fell upon Isaac—just as a like sleep fell on Saul and his body-guard, when, as one of my class once called it, “David prigged Saul's bottle and spear.” My common sense says if the Lord had reason enough for laying Saul asleep, he had five hundred times more for doing the same to Isaac.

Vicar.—Major Modest, may we ask your views of the subject?”

Major Modest.—I quite agree with our friend, Mr. Gentle, who, by his valuable quotation from Bishop Wilberforce, has, I think, settled the question most conclusively. As, however, he did not adduce the conclusions of any leading expositor, perhaps I may be allowed to read a selection I have made. It strikes me it will furnish a more valuable contribution to our

discussion than anything, to use a favourite phrase of Mr. Shrewd's, I might make out of my own head.

Vicar.—By all means.

Major Modest reads :—

Says the excellent Thomas Scott, "Certainly he (Isaac) did not attempt to escape or resist, but yielded up himself voluntarily to be a sacrifice."

Says quaint old John Trapp, "Who struggled not, neither resisted, though able for his age to have overmastered his old father." . . . "He was acquainted with God's counsel," says Luther, "wherein he rested."

Says Dr. Adam Clark, "We cannot say that the superior strength of the father prevailed, but the piety, filial affection, and obedience of the son yielded."

"We cannot doubt," says Bishop Patrick, "that Abraham had now acquainted him with the will of God, and persuaded him willingly to comply and submit unto it."

Thus writes Bishop Wordsworth, "Isaac's willing submission and obedience prefigured that of Christ, who consented to be bound for us and to be laid upon the wood of the cross and who said to His Father, 'Not my will, but thine be done.' . . . He is *silent*, and so he was a type of Him 'who was led like a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.' Here, then, Abraham was a representative of God the Father, and Isaac of God the Son."

"We know," says Calvin, "that he (Isaac) was then of middle age, so that he might either be more powerful than his father, or at least equal to resist him if they had to contend by force. Wherefore I do not think that force was employed against the youth as against one struggling and unwilling to die, but rather that he voluntarily surrendered himself. . . . Should anyone object that there was no necessity to bind one who willingly offered himself to death, I answer that the holy man anticipated in this way a possible danger, lest anything might happen in the midst of the act to interrupt it."

Says Orton "He was now near thirty years old, and was strong enough to have opposed, and young enough to have fled from his father. Yet the pious youth did neither!"

Dr. Rudge writes, "Moved by the most exalted piety and by a spirit of the most dutiful submission to the Divine Will, Isaac, like Him of whom he was an illustrious type, both in bearing the wood, and in other particulars, suffered himself to be laid as a lamb to the slaughter upon the altar which had been prepared."

Matthew Henry informs us that, "Abraham now tells him the amazing news, 'Isaac, thou art the lamb which God has provided.' Isaac, for aught that appears, is as willing as Abraham."

The following is good old Bishop Hall's interpretation :—

“Who cannot imagine with what perplexed mixtures of passions, with what changes of countenance, what doubts, what fears, what amazement, good! Isaac received this sudden message from the mouth of his father; how he questioned, how he pleaded! But when he had somewhat digested his thoughts, and considered that the author was God, the actor Abraham, the action a sacrifice, he now approves himself the son of Abraham; now he encourages the trembling hand of his father, with whom he strives in this praise of forwardness and obedience; now he offers his hands and feet to the cords; his throat to the knife; his body to the altar; and growing ambitious of the sword and fire, entreats his father to do that, which he would have done though he had dissuaded him.”

The universality of what I may call this impressive conviction, dear Mr. Vicar, is further illustrated by what even Mahomet says in the Koran (Chap. xxxvii, Sale's Trans.). “And when he (Isaac) had attained to years of discretion, and could join in acts of religion with him, Abraham said unto him, ‘O my son, verily I saw in a dream that I should offer thee in sacrifice; consider, therefore, what thou art of opinion I should do.’ He answered, ‘O my father, do what you are commanded: thou shalt find me a patient person.’”

And here, sir, I propose to leave the question, having already, as I conceive, adduced a weight

of authority to which it well becomes ourselves to bow.

Superintendent.—May I just call attention to the fact that Philo Judæus scarcely gives Isaac credit for any concurrence at all. His version of matters is this, “Abraham, betraying no alteration of voice, or countenance, or intention, looking at his son with steady eye, answered his question with a determination more steady still, ‘My son,’ said he, ‘God will provide himself a victim for the burnt-offering,’” and then, after one or two observations of a moral tendency, according to Philo, “he seized his son with all rapidity, and placed him on the altar,” and proceeded to utilize the knife.

Mr. Shrewd.—Without even saying “by your leave,” that is——

Vicar.—Yes; but pray let us remember that the subject is a sacred one. Mr. Logic, may we ask your view of it?

Mr. Logic.—Well, sir, I ever differ with the greatest diffidence from Mr. Gentle, even when he has not the advantage of Major Modest’s concurrence. On the present occasion, however, I differ from him without hesitation, and *in toto*. I might be prepared to accept Bishop Wilberforce’s standard were we on this occasion dealing with the actual rendering of a passage of Scripture. But I venture to think **we are** dealing with one of the Silences of Scripture, a totally different thing. Mr. Gentle himself admitted that the

passage does not, "in express terms settle the question one way or the other." In other words, we are seeking not to fathom what Scripture has said, but to fill up what Scripture has left unsaid, and hence what the bishop has written in the letter in question appears to me to be almost what lawyers call *res inter alios*, in fact is wholly beside the purpose.

Vicar.—But will not the difficulty remain that as regards the interpretation to be placed on the Silence now before us, Mr. Shrewd's proposed solution stands opposed to that which, to use the bishop's words, "God's saints from the beginning have been led to adopt?"

Mr. Logic.—Be it so. But surely their common interpretation, in matters which by the very hypothesis Scripture hath left undetermined or unrevealed, cannot carry with it the weight attaching to it when dealing with Scripture's express statements?

Vicar.—Yes, I think there is something in that. I incline to think, Mr. Gentle, that the bishop's standard rather refers to such matters as the Creeds have dealt with, than such a question as that now before us. Your own quotations indeed indicate as much.

Mr. Gentle.—I readily bow to your ruling, sir.

Artless.—If I might make bold to speak, sir, it has often seemed to be very funny-like that Scripture makes so much of Abraham being willing to kill Isaac, and nothing of Isaac being willing to be killed. Wouldn't it take more faith, sir, to obey God by being

killed, than to obey Him by killing somebody else? What Mr. Shrewd says about Isaac not knowing what was going on, being put into a deep sleep, looks very feasible and satisfactory-like.

Superintendent.—Ah! I confess that, assuming Isaac to have been a consciously concurring party, it does seem unspeakably singular that Hebrews xi did not, in verse 20 say, “By faith Isaac was willing to be offered up.” Instead of this it entirely ignores such exceptional devotedness to make his blessing his two sons the selected example in his case. What comparison is there for one moment between the two?

Curate.—Exactly. The absence of any even the faintest recognition of the part by the hypothesis played by Isaac would, on that hypothesis, be to my mind overwhelmingly perplexing. Gregory Nyssen, I remember, in his *De Deitate Filii et Spirit. Sanct.*, after remarking that all the horror of dissolution could not tempt the son to move for his own preservation, adds, “Which of the two shall we say deserves the precedence in our wonder and veneration? For there seems,” he continues, “to be a religious emulation or contest between them which should most distinguish himself.” I incline to agree with our young friend Artless that Isaac’s submission would far transcend Abraham’s. At any rate, if at the last moment he did voluntarily submit to be sacrificed, it is amazing that Scripture should preserve a dead silence on the subject and leave his praises to be sounded exclusively by un-

inspired discoverers of his deserts. I confess that, as at present advised, I lean to Mr. Shrewd's surmise.

Major Modest.—I am feeling a little stumbled, sir, at the first verse not saying, "God did tempt Abraham and Isaac his son." It certainly seems clear that whichever may have been the severer trial, both were tried.

Mr. Logic.—But is not the real question after all this—Does the Word of God anywhere or in any way, expressly or by implication, teach that Isaac was a conscious, willing, unresisting co-operator on the occasion.

Mr. Humble.—I humbly suggest, sir, that the Word of God nowhere says he fell into a deep sleep.

Mr. Logic.—No; nor does the Word of God anywhere say that Jacob ever asked Joseph the real history of his original disappearance, but who that knows aught of the human heart will thence infer that nothing ever passed between them on the subject. In such matters the silence of Scripture argues nothing either way.

Mr. Shrewd.—To pay you in your own coin, brother Humble, look here! If Isaac gave in, it must have been because of what his father urged. When did Abraham then speak up? Plain as a pikestaff from the Bible is it that Abraham kept the young fellow steadily in the dark up to the latest possible moment. Any speechifying must have occurred in the middle of the 9th verse. Where do you find it there? And what better right can any Father, commentator, expositor, doctor, or divine have to surmise a long say on Abraham's part, with ditto on Isaac's (surely there

would be a *leetle* argufying over such a question before the youngster gave in), than I have to surmise a deep sleep, there being plenty of precedents for such deep sleeps in Scripture?

Curate.—Besides, if we are to argue from our own instincts, feelings and experience to those of Abraham, why not to those of Isaac also? It strikes me very forcibly that not only would a most resolute protest have been strictly natural, but absolutely incumbent also. What proof had Isaac, what shadow of justification for believing that his father could possibly be right in attempting so unheard of a violation of God's law. Abraham had God's own word for what he was meditating, but Isaac only his father's.

Mr. Shrewd.—Precisely. And how could that justify him? Don't we all know what the man of God in the Book of Kings came in for, for taking the old prophet's word for what was a fleabite to son-slaying. Besides, Isaac was "a man subject to like passions as we are," and we may be pretty sure that whatever he might think of his father's veracity, love of dear life would make him mighty ready to question his sanity on this occasion.

Mr. Logic.—Just so. At best it must have seemed to him, as Paley would say, a contest of opposite improbabilities—a question whether it was not more probable that his father was for once under some hallucination, than that his proposed astounding procedure could possibly be the correct thing.

Mr. Shrewd.—To be sure. And would not his heart have said instantly “Verdict for probability No. 1,” and he have then and there taken a flying leap over the hedge the ram was caught in, and made off. I mind that so to skedaddle would have been the most dutiful thing he could do whether to God or his father, so preventing the latter from carrying out such a hideous unheard of operation.

Vicar.—I certainly feel a difficulty here. Archbishop Tillotson, I remember, says, “A revelation to another man is nothing to me unless I be assured that he had such a revelation, which I cannot be but either by another immediate revelation, or some miracle confirm it.” I do not quite see at present how any explanatory communication or assurance of Abraham’s, unaccompanied by a second divine manifestation, could have justified Isaac in submitting.

Mr. Humble.—Perhaps, sir, there was such a manifestation.

Vicar.—Yes ; but in that way you may go on multiplying “perhapses” until they outnumber the stars. The question, after all, is this—What does the text of Holy Scripture itself authorize us to credit or assume. Dr. Wellread, we have not heard your views this evening.

Dr. Wellread.—Well, sir, I am feeling more than one difficulty over the ordinary treatment of the subject. With regard to the one last mooted by yourself, I cannot for a moment doubt that nothing could have

legalized Isaac's concurrence but a second manifestation on all fours with that on which his father was himself acting. Consequently that it behoved the commentators while they were about it to assume a revelation at the last moment, not only by Abraham, but also by the Lord Himself. Another thing which perplexes me is, that while the objections which have been occurring to us to the theory of Isaac's conscious concurrence can surely not be pronounced puerile or groundless, not one of them, so far as I know, has been grappled with by a single commentator holding the common view. I know not if any one present has ever read Josephus' supposititious dialogue between Abraham and Isaac on this occasion. If he has, I imagine he will opine that even as truth is often stranger than fiction, so is the would-be serious often more comical than the comic. The more, however, I think over the matter the more incredible does it become to my mind that any young man in his senses, how accustomed soever to obey his father in all things, could ever at a moment's notice (for it must have been at a moment's notice or next door to it) have brought himself to believe in and reconcile such a scheme as his own assassination by his own parent on the sole ground of his father's *ipse dixit* that it was the Divine requirement.

Mr. Humble (to the Vicar).—May I humbly observe, sir, that this discussion has been very painful to my feelings, for it seems to me, sir, if we are to give up

Isaac being a willing victim, we lose one of the most precious types of our dear Lord and Master's sacrifice for us to be found in the whole Bible.

Mr. Shrewd.—Ah! brother Humble! brother Humble! beware of hungering and thirsting too much after types; especially now we've got what all types tend to. There's a lady I know at Norwood, a pious woman and no mistake. She has a rare sweet tooth for types. The other day I had a letter from her in which she said she was engaged in hunting out all the types she could in such and such a part of the Old Testament, and she found herself wonderfully refreshed and edified in so doing. Said I in reply, "Dear Madam, yours of such a date to hand. Instead of keeping on type-hunting, suppose you take a turn at truth-hunting. Yours truly, Ebenezer Shrewd."

Vicar.—But we are interrupting Dr. Wellread.

Artless.—Beg pardon, sir, but may I just ask, why was Isaac bound if he was in a deep sleep?

Mr. Shrewd.—Why was he bound if he was a consenting party?

Vicar.—I take it the binding was simply part of the *modus operandi* or ceremonial connected with the offering of sacrifice. Clearly Isaac was to be dealt with as a burnt offering. Dr. Wellread, pray resume.

Dr. Wellread.—Another thing that strikes me forcibly is this—Of all the patriarchs none would seem less likely to have proved equal without a series of miracles to

such a concurrence as is here contended for. Isaac had nothing of the hero about him. From cradle to grave he would seem to have been a very commonplace sort of person. Doubtless he was a gentle and dutiful son, but that hundreds of feeble characters in other respects, have also been.

Mr. Shrewd.—Precisely. Why *Punch* had a drawing the other day of a spooney-looking chap, and when some one says something disparaging of him, says *Punch*, "Ah! but he's such a good son."

Dr. Wellread.—I daresay that as a rule he was a tender and affectionate husband, but so far from being much of a marital hero, he was ready enough, like his father before him, to endanger his own wife's chastity, by flinching from owning her as his wife. I forget at the moment who, but some one has said of his conduct on this occasion that it was that "of a poor, paltry earthworm displaying cowardice, selfishness, readiness to put his wife in terrible hazard for his own sake." Nor can I see how such a verdict can be avoided. I know that Waterland argues he had a right to evade the difficulty so long as it could lawfully be evaded, but was that lawful evasion which could only be accomplished by falsehood? Isaac went further in the wrong direction than did Abraham. He turned a *suppressio veri* into an absolute *suggestio falsi*. Abraham could say "And yet she is my sister." Isaac could say nothing of the kind.

Vicar.—Bishop Wordsworth says that he perhaps

justified to himself the assertion on the plea that she was his *cousin*, which relationship was sometimes described by that word.

Dr. Wellread.—Yes ; but what does the bishop add, “And by the example of his father Abraham,” pertinently enough remarking that “the case is a warning to parents against sin, lest it reappear and be propagated in their children in a more aggravated form.” But I do not wish to press the point unduly. Any way, Isaac does not figure in the transaction as a hero promptly ready to part with life at duty’s call ; he is rather like one ready to treasure it at the cost of his character. Neither does he seem to have been a very influential ruler of his own household ; while, without making too much of his proposal to enjoy a savoury repast before issuing his blessing——

Mr. Gentle.—May I for mere fairness’ sake just mention that it has been suggested by writers of standing that this desire for savoury meat arose from the same kind of impulse as led Elisha (2 Kings iii. 15) to desire to be soothed by music before prophesying. The Gemarists distinctly charge sadness and grief with impeding the exercise of the gift of prophecy.

Superintendent.—But does not music appeal to a somewhat more exalted part of us than does savoury meat ? Moreover, the words “such as I love” import a measure of appreciation not confined to prophetic occasions.

Artless.—If I may make so bold, sir, he was a very

old gentleman at this time, and don't that make a difference? Very old people do very odd things—very different from when they were young.

Vicar.—Well, he was old as times go now, somewhere about 137, I believe, but he lived forty-three years after this, according to Genesis xxxv. 28. We are, however, again taking the matter out of Dr. Wellread's hands. Doctor, will you kindly complete what you have to say?

Dr. Wellread.—I hope I shall not be accused of desiring to blacken unduly the character of Isaac or of any other Bible personage. Believing, however, that there is not one jot or tittle of mere surplusage in Scripture, I cannot but be struck by the record that Isaac loved Esau "because he did eat of his venison." Surely no more anti-heroic ground for parental preference could well be suggested.

Vicar.—Yes; but a yet more painful matter is his attempting to give the more distinctive blessing of the Covenant to Esau, "to the neglect," as Mr. Fairbairn in his "Typology of Scripture," expresses it "of a Divine oracle going before, and the neglect also of the plainest indications afforded by the subsequent behaviour of the sons themselves." Even so reverent a writer as the learned Bishop of Lincoln treats Isaac as "swayed by partiality in desiring to confer the blessing on Esau," and suggests "that the fragrance of the savoury meat was a snare to him on the occasion."

Dr. Wellread.—Just so. Where then, I ask, in all

Isaac's recorded spirit and behaviour, find we one solitary trace of likelihood that he could ever have acted on Moriah's summit the part ordinarily attributed to him. Rather would he seem to have been another illustration of the truth of that New Testament affirmation that as a rule the Lord in preference to their opposite selects "the foolish things of the world," "the weak things of the world," and "the base things of the world," to the end that no flesh should glory in His presence. But it waxes late, sir, and we must think of separating. In conclusion, I beg to say that I adopt the surmise of Mr. Shrewd.

Vicar.—Has any other gentleman anything to add? Very well; then I now close our meditations on this deeply interesting narrative with a few words on the subject which has mainly exercised us this evening.

I am free to confess I can no longer adhere to the ordinary view of what now occurred on Moriah, so far as a conscious concurrence on Isaac's part is concerned. I do not say that I absolutely accept the surmise which Mr. Shrewd would substitute. It may be, indeed it is, the most probable which occurs to my mind, but where Holy Scripture has seen fit to remain silent I do not feel warranted in assuming *as certain* any probability whatever.

In an early stage of our meditations proof presented itself that suggestions connected with the ordinary line of assumption on the occasion had incited the Bible's adversaries not only to carp but to blaspheme.

Let us, for one thing, therefore, distinctly note that be the objections and difficulties thus urged what they may they concern not what Scripture has said, but what has been said for her without any countenance from her own utterances. Who shall say how much of the odium from age to age heaped on the one living and true Word of God has not been either begun or intensified or both in the same way. At any rate, whensoever so-called Bible difficulties confront us let us make very sure that they be difficulties for which the Bible itself, not traditional interpretation, is alone responsible. Of course, the mind of God and the mind of man, until the latter has been spiritually renovated, can never but be at daggers drawn, but the enmity may be largely aggravated by the treatment which exposition may adopt. Especially will this ensue where it is sought to fill up the "void places" of Scripture, the region of her silences, by means of would-be solutions, made, as Mr. Shrewd would say, out of Non-inspiration's own head.

The great duty, then, which I would here impress upon you, if I may so speak, is to Bereanize, and that habitually. Search the Scriptures daily, whether those things which fathers, bishops, pastors, have said or still say "are so." Only beware of doing this in an unhumble and self-confident spirit. Such a spirit will, without doubt, cause two grievous losses—the loss of direct benefit from the Scriptures themselves, and the loss of collateral benefit from the labours of

the expositors, which labours may after all confer incalculable advantages on an humble and prayerful student.

But the great thing of all is to secure evermore the unfailing help of God's Holy Spirit. Not by the might of intellectual energy—not by the power of scholarly exegesis; but by the Spirit's enlightenment, will the truth after all be duly reached. "*Bene precâsse*," said Luther, "*est bene studuisse*"—to have well-prayed, is to have well-studied. When you come upon a passage "hard to be understood," submit it to Him to whom Hezekiah submitted Sennacherib's letter. Wait on the Lord for light, and ere long there shall be light. I say not that there will come a sudden and startling mental illumination, proclaiming itself supernatural by its very suddenness. Sometimes, indeed, it may happen that in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the meaning of the passage will burst upon you—but oftener than not, the understanding will feel and find its attention noiselessly called to other texts, one after the other, of which before it was unaware, or had lost sight. Thus will the thoughts of the heart become slowly but surely established, and the feeling will more or less be, "I know, and am persuaded" that thus it is. The process will be as of Scripture acting self-expositorily—explaining what is its meaning in one place, by its own meaning in another.

To conclude. If to the cultivation of such a habit of

Scripture-searching our meditation on this august chapter shall in any degree have further inclined us, then not in vain shall we have been engaged in contemplating Abraham's *believing* purpose and effort to immolate his son Isaac on Moriah's memorable summit.

Let us now close by singing the doxology.

THE END.

